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The Interplay of Gothic and Historicity in Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron*

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INTRODUCTION

Clara Reeve, born on 23 January 1729, is an author who is usually remembered in connection with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. Nevertheless, Reeve's particular relationship with Gothic literature influenced this literary genre and provided features that became essential elements of Female Gothic writing. Her biography, though we lack much information, can still help the reader understand and interpret her most famous novel, *The Old English Baron*, by highlighting some of its key features such as religion, morality, and the use of supernatural machinery.

Clara was the eldest daughter of Reverend William Reeve, a clergyman of Ipswich. Despite the large size of the family, consisting of eight children, each of them received a proper education: one of Clara's siblings entered the church's service, following his father's footsteps; another brother of hers became the well-known Vice-Admiral Samuel Reeve, who took part in both the American Revolutionary War and the French Revolutionary War; Clara became a writer, best known for her Gothic novel *The Old English Baron*.

William was therefore an important figure in shaping Clara's future career: not only did he influence her ideas and reading tastes, but also his strict religious principles are found in her most famous work.

When William Reeve died in 1755, Clara moved to Colchester with her family and became a writer: she published *Original Poems on Several Occasions* in 1769, *The Phoenix* in 1772, *The Champion of Virtue* in 1777, *The Two Mentors* in 1783, and *The Progress of Romance* in 1785. In 1786, Clara Reeve moved back to Ipswich, and spent the rest of her life there writing new books, such as *Castle Connor* (1787), *The School for Widows* (1791), *Plans of Education* (1792), *The Memoirs of Sir Roger de Clarendon* (1793), *Memoirs of a Private Family* (1799), and *Edwin, King of Northumberland* (1802). Her retired life is the reason of limited biographical details; however, *The Old English Baron* once again provides the reader with some information about her private life. The 1780 edition of her most famous novel is indeed dedicated to Martha Bridgen, daughter of Samuel Richardson, known for his novels *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*

(1740) and *Clarissa, or History of a Young Lady* (1748). Between the two women there was not only mutual literary admiration, but also an intimate friendship. Miss Bridgen revised Reeve's novel and, as the preface of the last edition of *The Old English Baron* confirms, '[t]he author [could not] fully enjoy her success without acknowledging from whence she is in great measure derives'. Addressing directly to Martha, Clara Reeve wrote that '[y]ou have no reason to suspect me of flattery, but of vanity you may, in wishing to mention your name thus publicly as the patroness and friend of'¹.

Clara Reeve died in December 1807, when she was seventy-eight years old. She was buried in Ipswich, her hometown, and buried near to the grave of an old friend, Reverend Mr. Derby².

Her words for the *Monthly Magazine* summarize her modest self-appraisal, as well as her dedication to her novels, which displayed a moral and educational purpose, a goal which she tried to achieve throughout her life: '[I] have been all my life straitened in my circumstances, and used my pen to the best of my knowledge, on the side of truth, virtue, and morality, and I have endeavoured to use my talents, so as not to undervalue the gifts of heaven, nor overrate my own abilities'³.

The Old English Baron, *The Progress of Romance*, and the notion of 'romance' itself are essential elements of Reeve's career and writing; however, in order to fully understand the themes and features developed in her novels, some preliminary clarifications about the English literary taste and the Gothic literature are needed.

The eighteenth century opened in England with a wide-ranging debate on taste: from David Hume to Lord Kames, a close discussion developed on the terms and modalities of aesthetic pleasure⁴. Against the perfect symmetry of the Neoclassical concept of beauty, understood as the harmonious relationship among the parts, an aesthetic project based on the experience of the imagination was established: the proportions of the golden ratio were thus replaced by human measures. This was, as Romolo Runcini

¹ Clara Reeve, *The Old English Baron*, edited by James Trainer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 140.

² Walter Scott, *Lives of the Novelists* (Charleston: Nabu Press, 2012), 199.

³ *Monthly Magazine*, XXIV, quoted in Lorene Catherine Elder, *Clara Reeve's Gothic background* (Master's Thesis, Rice University, 1950), 9. <https://hdl.handle.net/1911/89400>.

⁴ Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance*, translated by Romolo Runcini (Napoli: Dick Peerson, 1987), XIV.

argues, the transition from the ancient theory of beauty to the new theory of sublime⁵.

Edmund Burke explains that these two theories, even if they describe the same concept, could not be more different. In his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), he gives the example of two animals of the same species endowed with great strength, the ox and the bull:

[a]n ox is a creature of vast strength; but he is an innocent creature, extremely serviceable, and not at all dangerous; for which reason the idea of an ox is by no means grand. A bull is strong too; but his strength is of another kind; often very destructive, seldom (at least amongst us) of any use in our business; the idea of a bull is therefore great, and it has frequently a place in sublime descriptions, and elevating comparisons⁶.

For Burke, the ox is calm, at the service of man, thus it represents the old concept of beauty and perfection; on the contrary the bull, being wild, impetuous, and unpredictable, exemplifies the new concept of the sublime.

The theory of the sublime was therefore fundamental in the eighteenth-century debate on taste and influenced a new literary genre, the Gothic, which pushed the minds of the readers to the limits of rationality.

Although at first booksellers perceived supernatural fiction as a threat, it became clear that they increased demand. As Emma Clery claims, '[s]upernatural fictions along the lines of *Otranto*' were the '[i]deal commodity for the libraries'⁷.

However, in the period up to the 1790s, this new interest was counterbalanced by '[t]he representation of the library as a civic institution with moral responsibilities'⁸. The opinions of readers and critics of the eighteenth century were thus clearly divided: while some promoted this new type of literature, many rejected it, condemning its

⁵ Reeve, *The Progress*, XVI.

⁶ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: Routledge, 1958), 64.

⁷ Emma J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 87.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

tendency to be irrational and to corrupt the minds of young people.

Runcini argues that Clara Reeve's writings represent both views⁹: *The Old English Baron* is indeed placed in the Gothic genre and, although the supernatural is confined within the limits of rationality, the novel employs many of the features of Gothic literature offered by *The Castle of Otranto*.

Instead, *The Progress of Romance* investigates the origin of the term 'romance': although Reeve's will to defend this literary genre, seen at that time as a model aimed at the imagination, she points out that this type of writing should promote morality and duty, without resorting to fantastic devices that could threaten the moral code of readers.

Indeed, Reeve's knowledge of foreign literature supported her theory that explained how 'romance [did not] belong to any one period of society'¹⁰: for example, she compared and displayed similarities between *Arabian Nights* and the *Odyssey*, stating that '[t]he likeness could not be accidental'¹¹. Even M. Vattier, who translated *The History of Ancient Aegypt according to the Traditions of the Arabians* in French, was surprised to discover a resemblance between European fiction and romances from foreign countries: '[I] little thought to find in an Arabian writer a story so nearly resembling the fables of the Greek and Latin poets. While I was writing, it frequently reminded me of the 4th book of the *Odyssey*, and of several parts of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*'¹².

Clara Reeve thus pointed out that the term 'romance' referred to many types of writing in the past: after the analysis of different definitions provided by several dictionaries, she affirmed that romance was '[a]n Heroic fable,- a fabulous story of such actions as are commonly ascribed to heroes, or men of extraordinary courage and abilities.- Or if you would allow of it, I would say an Epic in prose'¹³. Her definition was based on Pierre-Daniel Huet's, the author of *Traité de l'origine des Romans*: despite his description of romances as '[f]ictions of Love Adventures, writ in Prose with Art, for the delight and Instruction of the Readers'¹⁴, Reeve ignored the component of love, highlighting the romance's heroic and moral elements instead.

⁹ Reeve, *The Progress*, XXVI.

¹⁰ Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance*, vol. I (Colchester, 1785), 3.

¹¹ Clara Reeve, quoted in Elder, *Clara Reeve's Gothic background*, 12.

¹² Vattier, quoted in Elder, *Clara Reeve's Gothic background*, 12.

¹³ Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance* (Colchester, 1785), 13.

¹⁴ Huet, *A Treatise of Romances and their Original* (English Translation, London, 1672), 3.

As Michael Gamer argues, Reeve '[a]ttempt[ed] to rescue romance from its stigma as a pernicious genre': therefore, with the publication of *The Old English Baron*, she provided an '[i]mproved version of Gothic' which tried to 'blend [...] history and fiction under the assumption that each [would] correct, enhance, and complement the other'¹⁵.

Thirteen years after the publication of *The Castle of Otranto*, Clara Reeve published *The Champion of Virtue* (1777), the first edition of *The Old English Baron* which presented itself as an offspring of Walpole's famous novel. Reeve's revision of *The Castle of Otranto* aimed to unite ancient romance and modern novel by removing the excess of wonders found in Walpole's work. As Reeve wrote in the preface of the second edition of her novel, the '[b]usiness of Romance' was first '[to] excite the attention' and secondly '[t]o direct it to some useful, or at least innocent, end'¹⁶.

Therefore, Reeve wanted to improve *The Castle of Otranto* by '[t]ak[ing] Walpole's plot, of peasant providentially revealed as heir, and carefully purg[ing] it of ambiguities'¹⁷. As Clery notes, '[n]ow the usurper directly suffers the consequences of his actions and his offspring, who providentially die in childhood, are mentioned only in passing and retrospect, his wife not at all'; furthermore, '[t]he work of the supernatural is merely to dress and decorate [the] moral order [of the novel]'¹⁸.

It is clear that Reeve's story, while sharing some characteristics of the Gothic tradition, tried to distance itself from its fanciful and supernatural elements, focusing instead on its moral and historical aspects.

It is for this reason that Walter Scott, considered by critics as the founder of the historical novel, condemned *The Old English Baron* and defined it as an ordinary fiction. However, this does not mean that the author of *Waverley* did not appreciate supernatural stories. On the contrary, in the beginning of his career, Walter Scott used to write supernatural ballads¹⁹, such as *Annan Waters*, *The Young Tamlane* and *Thomas the Rhymer*, included in his anthology *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802). By the

¹⁵ Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 59.

¹⁶ Reeve, *English Baron*, 3.

¹⁷ Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 85.

¹⁸ Ibidem

¹⁹ Gamer, *Romanticism*, 172.

end of the eighteenth century, he met and became friend of Matthew Gregory Lewis, the author of the notorious Gothic novel *The Monk*, and some of Scott's poems were even included in *Tales of Wonder*, published by Lewis in 1801.

Nevertheless, the scandal that followed the publication of *The Monk* forced Scott to avoid any literary and political association with Lewis, despite their friendship and their like literary inclination.

Scott's Tory politics and his new friendships with famous antiquarians led him to criticize his own Gothic dramas: being potentially dangerous for his reputation, he commented with sarcasm on his previous literary production. He defined his interest in German literature, his imitations and translations of German dramas, and even his Gothic tragedies as 'German mad' productions: even if his passion for that genre was evident, he refused to be associated with it, and never again published works that could be related with it, and could affect his public life.

In his *Lives of the Novelists*, Scott investigated the life and works of several authors, including Horace Walpole and Clara Reeve, and analyzed both *The Castle of Otranto* and its offspring. He praised *The Castle of Otranto* and celebrated Walpole as a great Gothic author, who succeeded in creating a '[r]emarkable [...] tale of amusing fiction upon the basis of the ancient romances of chivalry'²⁰. On the contrary, as stated before, Scott dismissed Reeve's novel as an imitation of Walpole's work. What discouraged Scott was Reeve's lack of imagination: not only *The Old English Baron*, but any other novel by Reeve did not seem to be '[m]arked by high flights of fancy'²¹. This is the reason why Scott, although he described Clara Reeve as a capable writer, an '[a]imable and accomplished authoress'²², could not approve Reeve's novel.

However, Scott tried to justify Reeve's failure. For him, '[h]er secluded situation' and her '[a]cquaintance of events and characters derived from books alone' could not rival '[t]hose authors who gathered their knowledge of the human hearts from having [...] become acquainted by sad experience'. Moreover, Scott claimed that Walpole

²⁰ Scott, *Lives*, 177.

²¹ Scott, *Lives*, 201.

²² Walter Scott, *Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott, Bart*, vol. III (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1834), 334.

‘[k]new the world like a man’²³, and therefore was able to establish himself as an excellent and skillful writer.

Reeve’s reduced knowledge of the world, her status as a woman, and the limitations of supernatural machinery in *The Old English Baron* thus displayed, for Scott, Reeve’s inferiority.

This thesis will therefore attempt to analyze Reeve’s famous novel in relation to its historical period, and how Reeve employed Gothic features in very particular ways. The study of *The Old English Baron* will lead to an analysis of the similarities and differences between Reeve’s novel and *The Castle of Otranto*, from which Reeve’s work originated. The narrative device of the recovered manuscript, the description of a peasant whose manners resemble that of a nobleman (and who later discovers himself as the heir of a castle), and the use of supernatural as a tool to produce both excitement and fear in the reader, are only a few examples of the similar features employed by both novels. Differences can also be found between Reeve’s and Walpole’s narratives, which are presented in chapter 4 with the analysis of the villains of the two stories, Walter Lovel and Manfred.

The last part of the thesis will focus on *Waverley* and how Walter Scott, in his first historical novel, developed and expanded the relation between past and present. The supernatural, in Scott’s novel, displays its connection to the values of the past: fantasy and imagination are thus confined to forgotten places, whose antiquity allows an escape from the excess of reason of modern society.

Clara Reeve was one of the first authors to employ a moderate use of the supernatural machinery and to provide a more accurate historical background to a Gothic narration. Even though *The Old English Baron* cannot be praised for great originality, Reeve distinguished herself as a talented writer, who succeeded in creating a distinctive Gothic novel and who attempted to evolve this new literary genre by blending together plausible supernatural elements and the atmosphere of medieval romances.

²³ *Ibidem*.

1. GOTHIC FICTION

1.1 The Origins of the Gothic

At the end of the eighteenth century, critics were explicit in their condemnation of Gothic literature, rejecting the abundance of horror and grotesque in this new style, which was spreading as an '[u]nending torrent of trashy novels'²⁴.

Except for Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe, who were praised for their works, the majority of Gothic writers were criticized for their lack of morality. The substructure of this exclusion lies in the classical rules of Neoclassicism, during which the artistic production derived its style and taste from Roman and Greek culture.

The enlightened age promoted rationality, order, and proportion, therefore the term 'Gothic' started being associated with medieval practices and traditions, often related to barbarity, magic, violence and, more generally, disorder. The proto-industrialization and urbanization, which throughout the century forced the individual to become part of the social world, together with decisive economic, cultural, and political changes, defined a new society in which reason did not tolerate superstition and transgression.

Nevertheless, the Gothic fiction seemed to encourage the vices and superstitious practices of the Middle Ages: along with their chivalric customs and magical adventures, the new taste for exotic landscapes, the recent theory of the sublime, and the Graveyard poetry added new perspectives to this literary style.

The main features regarded an attraction to the threatening power of nature, which produced a sense of both terror and pleasure, and the interest in ruins, ancient castles and graveyards, as well as in themes related to mortality and sin: hence, eighteenth-century Gothic novels tried to challenge Neoclassical aesthetics with the imagination, confronting and breaking the limits of rationalism.

Neoclassical criticism did not tolerate the eighteenth-century Gothic tale in any of its forms: the disapproval and denunciation of the Gothic did not distinguish novel from romance, since the condemnation regarded the whole genre.

²⁴ Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996), 14.

However, the term ‘Gothic novel’ is not the most suitable one to describe the Gothic narrative of this period: to be more precise, ‘Gothic romance’ is a better option since this new kind of fiction was related to medieval romances and chivalry of seventeenth-century French fiction. John Cleland, in a review of Tobias Smollett’s *Peregrine Pickle* (1751), observed that this ‘[f]lood of novels, tales, romances, and other monsters of the imagination’ were imported from France, ‘[w]hose literary levity we have not been ashamed to adopt, and to encourage the propagation of so depraved a taste’²⁵. He insisted that

[r]omances and novels which turn upon characters out of nature, monsters of perfection, feats of chivalry, fairy-enchantments, and the whole train of the marvelously absurd, transport the reader unprofitably into the clouds, where he is sure to find no solid footing, or into those wilds of fancy, which go for ever out of the way of all human paths²⁶.

T. Row, in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* (1767), also condemned the moral degeneration of these romances, describing the reading of those depraved books as an ‘[u]nprofitable way of spending time’ and a danger especially for young people, as they could be ‘[c]orrupted by the giddy and fantastical notions of love and gallantry, imbibed from thence’²⁷. Therefore, the potential corruption of these tales became a threat to the morality and rationality promoted by Neoclassicism.

Against this general condemnation of novels and romances, James Beattie’s *On Fable and Romance* (1783) tried to differentiate their various forms, in order to distinguish worthwhile works from the valueless and worthless ones. Beattie’s essay focused on *Don Quixote*, stating that Cervantes’ masterpiece was a turning point in the history of literature: it announced the rise of novels, implying the end of medieval romances. In this modern narrative, authors like Fielding, Defoe and Richardson were praised as writers that tried to imitate nature, replacing the excesses of the previous

²⁵ John Cleland, *Review of Peregrine Pickle*, *Monthly Review* 4 (London, Mar. 1751), quoted in Ioan Williams, *Novel and Romance: A Documentary Record 1700–1800* (London: Routledge, 1970), 160.

²⁶ Cleland, quoted in Williams, *Novel*, 160.

²⁷ T. Row, ‘Letter to the Editor’, *Gentleman’s Magazine* 37 (London, Dec. 1767), quoted in Williams, *Novel*, 272.

tradition with moderation and rationality. However, Beattie also warned that romances were dangerous for the good moral of the eighteenth century: it was essential to distinguish between valuable works and immoral ones, since some of the modern romances '[t]end[ed] to corrupt the heart'²⁸.

Similarly, Samuel Johnson's *The Rambler* separated novels from romances: Johnson asserted that novels were instructive and in line with the morality of the modern society, whereas romances were too extravagant and far from the realism of novels²⁹. Their lack of moral was in contrast with the virtues and the imitation of nature promoted by novels: for Johnson, this was the main difference at the basis of the distinction between these two modern forms of narrative.

Criticism was thus concerned about how romances could affect readers: during the eighteenth century, fiction was regarded as a powerful tool for educational purposes, hence the novel could be accepted because of its realism and moral virtues. On the contrary, romances were condemned for their craving for breaking the rules: monsters, vices and wickedness could encourage superstition and threaten the moral conduct of readers. Therefore, the romance started being associated with the imagination and the supernatural, two essential features that could attract and corrupt young minds: thus, this new kind of fiction was classified as a childish fancy and an attempt to popularize misconduct and immorality.

Despite its general disapproval, however, romance did not relate to medieval narrative only. This term was used to refer to every modern unspecified narrative; hence female writers like Charlotte Lennox and Clara Reeve presented a different kind of fiction which tried to part from the romance condemned by the critics. *The Female Quixote*, a novel written by Charlotte Lennox in 1752, satirized romance by introducing a female protagonist who interpreted every event as if it was '[a] part of some great romantic adventure'³⁰.

Indeed, Clara Reeve, in her *Progress of Romance*, attempted to distinguish romance from novel, focusing her analysis on the seductive and corrupting power of romance: her distinction recalled Johnson's examination of this subject.

²⁸ James Beattie, *On Fable and Romance* (1783), quoted in Williams, *Novel*, 309.

²⁹ Botting, *Gothic*, 18-19.

³⁰ Botting, *Gothic*, 19.

However, despite the differences between novel and romance and their features, the origin of Gothic literature lied in Gothic architecture. As Carol Margaret Davison argues, '[t]he designation "Gothic novel" is an oxymoron, signifying "Old New", it registers a collision between the past and the present, [...] the conventional and the original'³¹: the author noted that this opposition between the ancient and the modern, which could be found in Gothic fiction, was coined to describe a '[t]ype of anti-classical architecture associated with barbarism'³², which then influenced the field of literature.

Indeed, Gothic architecture was despised during the eighteenth century: critics examined and reviewed its peculiar style only to depreciate it, praising, on the other hand, classical architecture. Joseph Addison dismissed the squalor of Gothic cathedrals by celebrating the Pantheon of Rome as an example of architectural perfection, whereas Neve's *Complete Builder's Guide*, written in 1703, rejected medieval constructions as '[m]assive, cumbersome and unwieldy'³³. Thus, the emphasis on Neoclassical rules reflected the values of a new society which wanted to part from the barbarity of the past.

Donato Bramante, the famous Renaissance architect, during the first decades of sixteenth century had already condemned all non-classical and non-Mediterranean styles in Europe; indeed, Giorgio Vasari used the term 'Gothic' to distinguish the medieval from the classical period. Furthermore, Vasari, in his *Lives of the Artists* (1550), referred to this style as '[m]onstrous and barbaric, wholly ignorant of any accepted ideas of sense and order'³⁴.

Strawberry Hill, the Gothic villa built by Walpole from 1749 onward, copied details '[f]rom topographical works, and imitated parts of Canterbury Cathedral, Westminster Abbey and York Minster'³⁵. Michael McCarthy argues that Walpole's desire was to introduce '[h]istoricism into the Gothic revival'³⁶. Yet Walpole performed this imitation in a very personal way: despite the exterior of the villa displayed attention to historical

³¹ Carol Margaret Davison, *History of the Gothic Literature 1764-1824* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), 25.

³² Davison, *History*, 25.

³³ Neve, *Complete Builder's Guide* (1703), quoted in Botting, *Gothic*, 20.

³⁴ Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 36, quoted in Nick Groom, *The Gothic: a very short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 13.

³⁵ James Watt, *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict, 1764-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 15.

³⁶ Michael McCarthy, *The Origins of the Gothic Revival* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), I, quoted in Watt, *The Gothic*, 15.

details, the interior was described by Walpole himself, in his *A Description of the Villa*, as an '[a]ssemblage of curious Trifles'³⁷.

The unique style of Strawberry Hill inspired the description of the Gothic castle in *The Castle of Otranto*, and the villa soon became a tourist attraction: according to Dale Townshend, Walpole's servants even sold tickets and guided visitors through selected portions of the house³⁸.

Townshend also argues that if parallels are found between Strawberry Hill and *The Castle of Otranto*, also Fonthill Abbey and *Vathek* present a continuum between fictional and real Gothic³⁹. William Beckford took much of his inspiration from Gothic monasteries of the Grande Chartreuse in France, which he visited in 1778; while the influence of the exclusive style of Fonthill Abbey can be found in his renowned *Vathek*. Nevertheless, Beckford's villa was not as lucky as Strawberry Hill: John Carter, in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, dismissed Fonthill Abbey and Gothic architecture as the '[e]pitome of this monstrous style'⁴⁰, whereas William Hazlitt, in *The London Magazine*, described it as a '[w]aste of laborious idleness, a cathedral turned into a toy-shop, an immense museum of all that is most curious and costly, and, at the same time, most worthless, in the productions of art and nature'⁴¹.

Although on the one hand Gothic architecture and literature were dismissed because in contrast with the values promoted by the Enlightenment culture, on the other antiquarianism, the Graveyard school of poetry, and the new theory of sublime, gave to the term 'Gothic' a new positive significance.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, Graveyard poetry was much in vogue: its insistence on descriptions of ruins, shadows and ghosts, presented an opposition to the rationality of the modern society. However, topics like death, night, and the supernatural

³⁷ Horace Walpole, *A Description of the Villa of Mr. Horace Walpole, Youngest Son of Sir Robert Walpole, Earl of Orford, At Strawberry-Hill near Twickenham, Middlesex. With an Inventory of the Furniture, Pictures, Curiosities* (London: Strawberry Hill Press, 1784), I. Last accessed in October 2014. https://archive.org/details/descriptionofvil00walp_0/page/n12/mode/1up

³⁸ Dale Townshend, *Gothic Antiquity History, Romance, and the Architectural Imagination, 1760–1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 94.

³⁹ Townshend, *Gothic Antiquity*, X.

⁴⁰ Townshend, *Gothic Antiquity*, 286.

⁴¹ William Hazlitt, *Fonthill Abbey in Criticisms on Art; and Sketches of the Picture Galleries of England* (London: John Templeman, 1843), 284, quoted in Townshend, *Gothic Antiquity*, 351.

had not been chosen to wholly reject modern culture; on the contrary, the Graveyard poets warned readers about the horrors derived from these themes. Therefore, death was a solemn subject on which people had to reflect on: since death could lead to heaven, literature did not have to condemn it but, on the contrary, it needed to accept and develop this topic. Robert Blair and Edward Young, two essential figures of the Graveyard school, contemplated death as a symbol of hope for the afterlife. Blair's *The Grave*, written in 1743, focused on spiritual matters, and how the soul would ascend to heaven after being relieved from the pain of death:

Thrice welcome Death!
That after many a painful bleeding Step
Conducts us to our Home, and lands us safe
On the long-wish'd for Shore⁴²

Instead, the *Night Thoughts*, which Young wrote between 1749 and 1751, developed evangelical themes by celebrating the antithesis of light and darkness. Thus, night, death and darkness were valued as crucial elements that eighteenth-century poets had to reconsider and reevaluate:

Let Indians, and the gay, like Indians, fond
Of feather'd fopperies, the sun adore;
Darkness has more Divinity for me,
It strikes Thought inward, it drives back the Soul
To settle on Herself, our Point supreme!⁴³

The *Night Thoughts*, as David Punter argues, with its epic tone displayed the '[i]mplications for human status' and focused on death '[t]o experience the ultimate anguish'⁴⁴. The night, being related to fear and mystery, earned a '[p]ositive place in Young's cosmic scheme'⁴⁵: the day became the time of reason, whereas during the night

⁴² Robert Blair, *The Grave* (Los Angeles: Augustan Reprint Society, 1973), ll. 706-9.

⁴³ Edward Young, *Night Thoughts*, edited by Stephen Cornford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), v. 126-30.

⁴⁴ David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*, vol. I (London: Routledge, 2013), 36.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

the poet could '[s]oar [...] into the boundless reaches of the universe'⁴⁶: for Young, the night could provide a new kind of knowledge which aspired to divinity.

The Graveyard poetry attempted to develop the concept of light and dark from a new perspective, aiming to revise and correct the limits of rationalism: by presenting features in contrast with the Enlightenment, the Graveyard school managed to reconsider the power of the imagination, as well as topics like death and darkness. However, the Graveyard poetry's aim was also to dismantle the seductive power of those elements, promoting '[m]oral instruction rather than excitement'⁴⁷.

In a period in which critics promoted order and imitation of nature, Richard Hurd too defended Gothic culture in his *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762), challenging Neoclassical tradition and criticism. By quoting writers such as Tasso, Ariosto, Shakespeare and Milton, he argued that even these authors were '[s]educed by these barbarities of their forefathers; were even charmed by the Gothic Romances'⁴⁸. Hurd claimed that the excessive criticism of eighteenth-century fiction did not take into account that romances were the natural consequence of '[c]hivalry and feudal customs'⁴⁹. Even authors such as Spenser and Milton were attracted by the power of imagination. Furthermore, Hurd highlighted the presence of rules in Gothic architecture, presenting this architectural style as not being different from any other one.

Eighteenth-century critics thought that Gothic building lacked uniformity, order and discipline, and praised on the contrary classical rules of harmony; however, Hurd underlined that those two architectural styles differed only in the content of their rules. With his *Letters*, Hurd condemned the prejudices of criticism, declaring that poetry should investigate the mysteries of nature with the power of the imagination. So Hurd's position against general criticism of modern fiction represents a shift in eighteenth-century's conception of nature and literature. Mountains, waterfalls and, more generally, dangerous natural landscapes, which challenged the idea of uniformity and regularity, started being considered as examples of the natural sublime. This concept was

⁴⁶ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, 37

⁴⁷ Botting, *Gothic*, 23.

⁴⁸ Richard Hurd, *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762), 4. Last accessed in February 2002. <https://archive.org/details/lettersonchival00hurgoog/page/n13/mode/2up>

⁴⁹ Botting, *Gothic*, 24.

developed in the famous *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, written in 1757 by Edmund Burke. The aforementioned natural sceneries, for Burke, evoked the sublime, by which the individual could feel both pleasure and horror. Therefore, the theory of sublime was related to concepts like greatness, vastness, power and terror, everything that pushed our mind beyond its rational limits. Indeed, in his *Philosophical Enquiry*, Burke established a connection between terror and sublimity:

[w]hatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible subjects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling⁵⁰.

Burke also highlighted a difference between the beautiful and the sublime. The beautiful was related to delicacy, smoothness and smallness: thus, beautiful objects were aesthetically pleasing, according to the ideas of order and symmetry. On the contrary, the sublime made the individual experience divine power, an excess that the rational mind could not process: sublimity evoked delight and fear, emotions which related to gloriousness and obscurity at the same time. Already John Baillie, in his *An Essay on the Sublime* (1747), interpreted the sublime as ‘[e]verything which raises the Mind to fits of Greatness and disposes it to soar above her Mother Earth’: hence, Baillie described the experience of sublime as something that ‘[d]isposes the Mind to this Enlargement of itself’⁵¹.

The importance of Burke’s treatise for Gothic writers was central since it was the first attempt to ‘[s]ystematize a connection between sublimity and terror’⁵². Hence, the theory of the sublime, the revival of interest in antiquity and the Graveyard poetry challenged the eighteenth-century rationalism in their own way and laid the foundation for Gothic fiction. A changing attitude started to be perceived: Nature, once considered an example of order and beauty, became the mirror of greatness beyond any possible

⁵⁰ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: Routledge, 1958), 39.

⁵¹ John Baillie, *An Essay on the Sublime* (Los Angeles: Augustan Reprint Society, 1953), 4.

⁵² Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, 39.

measurement of the mind. Poets dealt with topics like death and darkness in order to reflect on spiritual and religious matters. The ‘barbarous’ architecture of medieval times was reevaluated. The supernatural and the power of imagination were reconsidered: those features that were once condemned as a threat to rationalism, now were paving the way for new ideas and possibilities.

As David Punter suggests, the explanation for this shift could lie in a ‘[c]ontradiction in the history of eighteenth-century ideas, a contradiction between “official culture” and actual taste’⁵³. Punter believes that the ‘official culture’ of the eighteenth century was represented by the great era of Enlightenment and rationalism; however, Gothic fiction satisfied the ‘actual taste’ of readers by crushing ‘[t]he balance and reason of the Enlightenment’ with ‘[f]eeling and passion’⁵⁴.

The commercial production of the eighteenth century was fascinated by the supernatural: the invisible world, instead of being demystified by Enlightenment’s beliefs, was on the contrary rediscovered by the modern world of commerce. Doubt concerning the existence of ghosts influenced not only Gothic fiction but, against all the expectations of rationalists, also newspapers and journals.

The *London Daily Newspaper* of January 1762 reported that a young lady had been imprisoned and murdered by poisoning in a house in Cock Lane, London. However, the most sensational revelation was the source of that story: it was the victim herself who returned to our world as a ghost, in order to solve the mystery of her departure and thus incriminate her murderer. ‘Scratching Fanny’, as the journals started to call her because of the rapping and scrapping noises heard in the house, was believed to be the ghost of Fanny Lynes, lover of William Kent: the same year of her death, in 1760, the two rented a room in the house of Richard Parsons in Cock Lane. She had officially died from smallpox, however when two years later the haunted house captured the public attention, people believed that Scratching Fanny had been poisoned by Kent. Their relationship was illicit, since William’s first wife was Fanny’s deceased sister, Elizabeth Lynes; in addition to this, Kent was known to be a usurer from Norfolk. The system of knocks proposed to the ghost, one knock signifying yes and two no, became the

⁵³ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, 23.

⁵⁴ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, 26.

evidence that could prove that Fanny had been murdered by Kent.

The commercial success of this supernatural anecdote inspired poems, ballads and prints, and even famous writers like Samuel Johnson and Horace Walpole happened to know about Lynes' tragedy. However, their scepticism was confirmed some weeks later by the discovery of a wooden block under Elizabeth Parson's bed, the young daughter of Richard Parson, who used it to produce the scratching heard by the people who came to visit the house. The ghostly visitations in the haunted house of Cock Lane were exposed as a fraud; nevertheless, they showed a public interest in supernatural stories. Walpole, in a letter to his friend George Montagu, described his visit to Cock Lane as follows:

[I] could send you volumes on the ghost; I went to hear it – for it is not an apparition, but an audition. [...] The house, which is borrowed, is wretchedly small and miserable. [...] We opened the chamber, in which were fifty people. [...] We stayed, however, till half an hour after one⁵⁵.

The overcrowded room and the general interest in the figure of Scratching Fanny proved that, even if sceptics, people were seduced by the scandalous reputation of Cock Lane's house.

As Emma Clery argues, the 'spectacular supernatural'⁵⁶ challenged Neoclassicism and captured public attention: this was the reason why people wanted to witness the ghostly apparition and waited hours hoping to see something they had been told would not have happened. Therefore, supernatural started to attract not only Gothic writers: it also aroused the interest of journals, occasional readers and even sceptics.

⁵⁵ Horace Walpole, *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence, vol. X* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 5.

⁵⁶ Emma J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 25.

1.2 Gothic Novels

Since the publication of *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764, Horace Walpole had been regarded as the originator of Gothic fiction: however, the genre of the Gothic romance owes its name to the subtitle of the second edition, which defined this work as ‘A Gothic Story’. James Watt claims that the preface to *The Castle of Otranto*’s second edition was presented as a manifesto of ‘[t]he revival of imagination in an era that privileged rationality’⁵⁷. Therefore, the aim of Walpole’s story was to shape the emergence of a new literary genre, reconsidering ‘[t]he so-called Gothic romance from a historical perspective’⁵⁸.

Some of the classic Gothic romances written by Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis were depicted as dark books, whereas *The Castle of Otranto* was ‘[I]ight and airy, a fairy-tale rather than a nightmare’⁵⁹. Thus, the value of *The Castle of Otranto* lied in its combination of realism and fantasy and its intention to encourage a new tradition of romance, rather than scaring readers with horrific visions. Nevertheless, *The Castle of Otranto* offered features which would become essential in the Gothic tradition, such as supernatural appearances, tyrannical barons and discoveries of secret paternities.

Punter argues that Walpole’s characters could be described as puppets, given that they ‘[a]re neither lifelike nor reasonable in themselves’⁶⁰; furthermore, the supernatural appearances were meant to amuse the reader, rather than to terrify him. Therefore, the exaggerated devices used in *The Castle of Otranto* had the effect of distancing the reader; moreover, Walpole’s insertion of historical details were sporadic, displaying the author’s will to evoke a general medieval setting rather than a real historical accuracy. However, *The Castle of Otranto* displayed historical evidence of an eighteenth-century view of aristocracy and feudalism: by placing contemporary uncertainty about the past in a medieval setting, Walpole revisited the theme of the sins of the fathers upon their children, originating one of the main features of Gothic romances. Hence Walpole’s work, through its historical dimension and its villains, highlighted a social anxiety

⁵⁷ Watt, *Contesting the Gothic*, 1.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁹ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, 44.

⁶⁰ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, 45.

which seemed to come from the past. The blend of attraction and repulsion of the medieval times, reflected by the same attitude towards the supernatural, connected history with the occult and the unknown. Therefore, the supernatural itself embodied the '[i]nfluence of the past over the present'⁶¹, becoming a symbol of the past rising against the modern society.

Thirteen years after the publication of *The Castle of Otranto*, Clara Reeve followed the example of Walpole. *The Old English Baron*, published in 1777, combined the supernatural devices used by Walpole with the historical setting of Thomas Leland's *Longsword*⁶²(1762): the attempt to limit the interest in the supernatural through didactic purposes was indeed central in Reeve's work. The author of *The Old English Baron* condemned *The Castle of Otranto* because it had used the supernatural to amuse the readers, reducing narrative probability and sacrificing historical accuracy. On the contrary, Reeve's work differed from Walpole's romance in both '[i]ntention and tone'⁶³. Clara Reeve's attempt to break the conventional features of the Gothic fiction was displayed in the main character of *The Old English Baron*, Edmund Twyford: by using the traditional cliché of a young man who discovers the secret of his noble birth, Reeve tried to represent the world of the eighteenth-century middle class, taking the Gothic outside the category of an aristocratic genre, as displayed by Walpole.

Despite the fact that Reeve's work curbed its supernatural features in order to focus on historicity and the representation of modern society's manners, there was a peculiar continuity between Walpole and Reeve. Both *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Old English Baron* were presented as manuscripts discovered by their authors; however, after their success, both writers reclaimed their authorship. Nevertheless, the manuscript device improved the verisimilitude of these works: Clery claims that even if Walpole and Reeve had different purposes⁶⁴, the discovery of an old manuscript helped their narrative to justify the supernatural elements, as well as medieval settings and

⁶¹ Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 73.

⁶² *Longsword* is a medieval romance written by the Irish writer Thomas Leland and published in 1762. Based on the life of William Longespée, son of Henry II, *Longsword* is a precursor to the Gothic novel: it provides vital elements of prototype for Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and Lewis' *The Monk*, such as dark dungeons, evil monks and heartless villains.

⁶³ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, 48.

⁶⁴ Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 83-89.

historicity.

As Punter argues, the complexity of the concept of manuscripts and the influence of historicity in Gothic fiction reached its apex⁶⁵ with Sophia Lee's *The Recess*, published between 1783 and 1785. Using the form of the epistolary novel, Lee's work increased its complexity by presenting portions of manuscript and letters. Unfolding the stories of two illegitimate daughters of Mary Queen of Scots, Lee focused the narration on major events of Elizabeth's reign, underlying the importance of history and offering a '[m]ultiply subjective view of history, which throws into question our assumptions about the supposed objectivity of mainstream historical accounts'⁶⁶. For this reason, the adventures of the two imaginary sisters highlighted their different perspectives on same events, letting the reader resolve the conflicts and contradictions contained in Lee's work: thus, *The Recess* allowed the readers to make up their minds about history, giving them more freedom than any other novel of the period.

Lee's settings and characters placed this author closer to Radcliffe than to Walpole or Reeve, for her singular development of historical themes prefigured those of the future Gothic writers. If Reeve's interest in historicity was related to didactical purposes⁶⁷, Lee's attention to historical details was associated with the reader's interpretative skills: she did not claim her own truth, on the contrary the doubt and indecisiveness generated in the reader's mind was a key feature which would become an essential theme in the later Gothic romances.

Despite its nature as an historical novel, *The Recess* presented various themes of the Gothic tradition such as persecution, irrational fears and ambiguous narrators. The complexity of eighteenth-century fiction blurred the line between the Gothic and the historical novel, for both genres seemed to have influenced each other. Their respective concern on an obscure past developed different kind of new fiction during the 1770s and 1780s, but what they had in common was '[a] drive to come to terms with the

⁶⁵ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, 50.

⁶⁶ Diana Wallace, *Female Gothic Histories Gender, History and the Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), 25.

⁶⁷ Reeve's narrative handles events with historical fidelity: elements such as religion, costumes, and historical details lend credence to the events of her stories, whereas a language suitable for modern readers is employed to promote morality and duty.

barbaric'⁶⁸.

In the mid-1790s, Gothic fiction reached its peak. It became the dominant genre of the decade, and its popularity can be explained through its transgressive contents: it offered an escape from the political and cultural life, providing historically remote actions and settings. The two main protagonists of this period were Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis and their most important works, respectively *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Monk* (1796), defined two distinct types of Gothic fiction, which had been greeted by reviewers with a mixture of admiration and disapproval.

Ann Radcliffe's allusions and literary quotations in her texts suggested a literary education and a wide range of reading: Milton and Shakespeare were two of her main influences. However, James Watt, as well as other critics, argued that the five novels she wrote also owed a debt⁶⁹ to Sophia Lee's work, *The Recess*: the unclearness in several situations of danger and the psychological development of characters were central in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* as they were in *The Recess*, and shaped a new kind of Gothic fiction which relied more on doubt and suspense and less on supernatural terror.

The simple narrative of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* revolves around the female protagonist Emily St. Aubert. After the loss of her mother, Emily starts a journey with her father: along the way she falls in love with a young man, Valancourt, while unfortunately her only parent dies after a long illness, leaving her in financial distress. In the central part of the book, she finds herself imprisoned in the castle of Udolpho, which belongs to Montoni, a sinister Italian nobleman who married Emily's aunt, Madame Cheron. In this typical Gothic setting, attempts to raping, theft and forced marriage take place in unclear ways, underlying the presence of supernatural forces which however do not come to pass. Eventually, Emily escapes, and after having rediscovered Valancourt, the two get married, providing the heroine a '[r]efuge from corruption'⁷⁰.

Radcliffe depicted the cruel villain Montoni following the Gothic tradition of the

⁶⁸ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, 52.

⁶⁹ Watt, *Contesting the Gothic*, 9.

⁷⁰ Watt, *Contesting the Gothic*, 111.

subtle noblemen who lives in a haunted castle; in addition, the Italian setting provided the traditional catholic background, which develops the theme of the obscure past which rises against the present.

However, the Gothic feature which brought innovation to the genre was represented through the figure of Emily. Even if she could be interpreted as the conventional eighteenth-century heroine, the psychological development of her character displays a persistent blurring of boundaries between fantasy and reality, originating a new kind of protagonist with a '[d]islocated mind'⁷¹. Watt claims that the terrifying scenes which take place in the castle are often related to ancient legends and cruel stories of murder, and the imagination of Emily helps them to overcome rationality⁷².

Nonetheless, in the end Radcliffe justified the supernatural machinery in a rational way, offering an explanation which allowed the use of such a fictional feature; the *Monthly Review*'s review praised her choice, highlighting that in *Udolpho* the reader would never believe in the supernatural world:

[w]ithout introducing into her narrative anything really supernatural, Mrs Radcliffe has contrived to produce so powerful an effect as if the invisible world had been obedient to her magic spell; and the reader experiences in perfection the strange luxury of artificial terror without being obliged for a moment to hoodwink his reason, or to yield to the weakness of superstitious credulity⁷³.

Therefore, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* followed the tradition of the Gothic fiction started by Walpole, by presenting the supernatural as a tool to amuse the reader; nevertheless, the features of the female Gothic tradition were introduced through limiting its scope. Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* and Sophia Lee's *The Recess* provided a new kind of narrative in which the supernatural was reduced or even replaced by ambiguous and unclear psychological situations. Consequently, Ann Radcliffe developed and shaped these innovations in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, in which the traditional and

⁷¹ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, 60.

⁷² Watt, *Contesting the Gothic*, 105.

⁷³ *Monthly Review* (1794), Williams (ed.), *Novel and Romance*, 393, quoted in Watt, *Contesting the Gothic*, 115.

modern Gothic features were displayed through the characters of Montoni and Emily.

If Ann Radcliffe was fond of privacy and scholars know little about her life, on the contrary Matthew Lewis' biography is full of information, for he was a seeker of publicity. He belonged to a rich family and after leaving politics out of boredom, he succeeded in his literary career by translating German works and writing plays. However, Lewis' most important work was the only and juvenile novel he wrote, *The Monk* (1796), an example of an '[e]xtremely crude'⁷⁴ and surreal narration in which the aspect of horror of the eighteenth-century Gothic fiction was taken to the extreme.

The co-presence of two stories in *The Monk* allowed a '[d]ramatic alternation'⁷⁵ which gave energy and rhythm to Lewis' narration, a feature which lacked in Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. The former's story is about Ambrosio, a virtuous monk, famous throughout Madrid for his powerful sermons. In the abbey, his novice Rosario is revealed to be a woman, Matilda, who seduces him: she sets Ambrosio on a course of self-destruction, which leads him to the rape of a young woman, Antonia, and the murder of the girl's mother, Elvira. The latter's story is about Agnes and Raymond, two lovers who refuse the will of Agnes' parents to send her to convent. In the vaults of Ambrosio's convent, the protagonists of the two stories meet and, after the rescue of Agnes, who is found imprisoned in the crypt, Ambrosio is brought before the Inquisition. In despair, the monk begs Satan to save him in exchange for his soul: the devil signs the contract and then reveals to Ambrosio that Antonia was in fact her sister, and Elvira her mother. The crime of incest is added to the sins of murder and rape; after this final revelation, Satan claims his soul by bringing him to a horrible death.

Like Radcliffe, the author of *The Monk* was influenced by Milton and Shakespeare, but the substantial sources which formed Lewis' Gothic fiction can be found in German writings, whose narration could be extraordinarily crude. Matilda, who in the end is revealed to be a demon in the service of Satan, displays a kind of supernatural power which is not softened or blurred. Peter Brooks argues that her seductive power leads

⁷⁴ Glennis Byron and David Punter, *The Gothic* (New Jersey: Blackwell Publisher, 2004), 141.

⁷⁵ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, 60.

Ambrosio to perdition⁷⁶, validating dark and unknown forces as real and threatening. In addition, Lewis followed the traditional Gothic literature by introducing virtuous characters like Antonia and Agnes, innocent ladies in distress that need a hero to be saved, and Gothic settings, like crypts, monasteries, cathedrals and dungeons.

Therefore, *The Monk* took the Gothic fiction a step further by presenting its traditional features with a crude and antirealist narration. Indeed, as Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy argue, the '[h]ero-villain-victim are wrought together in the figure of Ambrosio'⁷⁷: major themes like sex, persecution and murder are all developed through the character of the monk, offering a new type of protagonist who becomes an example of both virtue and corruption.

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Ann Radcliffe blurred the boundaries of fantasy and reality, resolving the supernatural machinery with logic and lucidity, whilst, on the contrary, Lewis made no excuses for the supernatural, creating a world in which unknown powers are real and dangerous⁷⁸ and not only a tool to amuse readers. With *The Monk*, Lewis parted from the kind of Gothic literature promoted by Reeve, in which the supernatural was limited and explained; instead, he encouraged a new type of Gothic fiction, which included macabre descriptions, the '[e]xplicit physicality of horror'⁷⁹, and supernatural legends and appearances.

⁷⁶ Peter Brooks, *Virtue and Terror: The Monk*, ELH 40, no. 2 (Summer, 1973), 250.

⁷⁷ Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy, *Routledge Companion to Gothic* (London: Routledge, 2007), 23.

⁷⁸ Andrew Smith, *Gothic Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 27-28.

⁷⁹ Spooner and McEvoy, *Companion to Gothic*, 147.

2. WALTER SCOTT AND THE SUPERNATURAL

2.1 Gothic Influences

His accomplishment remains, I think, almost unparalleled, even in our era of smash hits and giant blockbusters. In the first thirty years of the nineteenth century, he published roughly thirty popular books: books whose sale was markedly profitable for those involved. This number does not include the ten or so books that either were not terribly successful or which were designed for a small audience. As far as I know, no one ever lost money publishing a book written by Walter Scott¹.

Peter Murphy's above-mentioned quote underlines the huge commercial success of Walter Scott in the first decades of the nineteenth century, and his unprecedented popularity as a poet.

Born on 15 August 1771, the famous historical novelist grew in Edinburgh, where his early readings included poems, history books and chivalric romances. At the age of twelve he studied classics at the University of Edinburgh, and during his youth he had the chance to meet renowned poets like Thomas Blacklock and Robert Burns. Despite his predilection for literature, in 1792 he became a lawyer in Edinburgh, and pursued his literary career only at the end of the century.

Between 1805 and 1813 he achieved an unparalleled success as a writer of metrical romances. As Jane Millgate notes, his '[l]ater career was necessarily built upon [...] his earlier career both as a poet and, earlier still, as a translator, collector, editor, and annotator'². Scott's letters uphold the idea that, because of his fame, claiming the authorship of his works was perceived by the author like a constraint: Scott's pseudonymity is found especially on his later career.

¹ Peter Murphy, *Poetry as an Occupation and an Art in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 136.

² Jane Millgate, *Walter Scott: The Making of the Novelist* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 3. Millgate also adds that 'many of the habits of mind and imagination that contributed to the shaping of the sequence of Waverley Novels are already detectable in the themes, structures, and techniques of Scott's poems and editorial enterprises'. Ibidem.

Publishing *Waverley* (1814), one of his most important novels, anonymously, granted him '[a] great deal of fun in the accomplishment of the task'³: Scott even argued that giving up anonymity would have precluded him '[t]he pleasure of writing again'⁴. Nevertheless, to better comprehend Scott's authorial decisions, other elements need to be considered.

Scott generally refused to authorize cheap editions of his works, and was well known for being a writer who valued his compositions in terms of money. Indeed, Lord Byron, in his *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, included Walter Scott among the poets who wrote '[f]or lucre [or] for fame'⁵:

And think'st thou, Scott! By vain conceit perhance,
On public taste to foist thy stale romance,
Though Murray with his Miller may combine
To yield thy muse just half-a-crown per line?
No! when the sons of song descend to trade,
Their bays are sear, their former laurels fade⁶.

However, Walter Scott's manipulation of authorship is also related to the logics of gender and genre: claiming the authorship of *Waverley*, as Scott himself described in his letters, would have been '[i]ndecorous'⁷. In *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, Byron had pointed to the erosion of the literary culture, caused by the low level of literature of his time which was caused by female readers. Therefore, Scott was not inclined to be associated with this kind of 'female' literature, the Gothic romance, even if he was well aware of its status: throughout his career, he tried to detach his public image from female readers and Gothic culture. Indeed, as Gamer argues, Scott showed '[a]n especially strong disinclination to be associated too closely with Gothic romance and, as

³ Walter Scott, *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, vol. III, ed. H.J.C. Grierson (London: Constable and Co. 1932), 457.

⁴ Scott, *Letters*, 479.

⁵ Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, vol. II, ed. Jerome McGann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 234, line 178.

⁶ Byron, *Poetical Works*, 234, line 171-6.

⁷ Scott, *Letters*, 479.

he put it, other “missy form[s] of publication”⁸. Thus, as Gamer observes, this ‘feminine’ literary genre was placed by Scott ‘on the bottom rung of prose fiction’⁹.

Scott’s will to keep distance from this genre in his works does not imply that he was not interested in this kind of fiction: as Fiona Robertson observes, Scott supported ‘[t]hose writers of terror-fiction, whom he admired as original creators’¹⁰.

His *Lives of the Novelists*, as well as *Essay on the Imitations of the Ancient Ballad*, provide details of the lives and works by some of the main authors of Gothic fiction such as Horace Walpole, Clara Reeve, Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Gregory Lewis, showing Scott’s interest toward this genre rejected by other critics. Furthermore, these writings display a gendered hierarchy of Gothic literature in which the masculine Gothic, developed by Walpole and Lewis, is described by Scott as more imaginative and better written than the feminine Gothic of Reeve and Radcliffe, underlining a categorization of gender not only among readers of Gothic fiction but also among authors.

Michael Gamer notes that Scott’s ‘[p]rimary task in providing introductory essays to work by Walpole, Reeve, and Radcliffe was, of course, to sell books by reviving interest in a genre that had begun in 1821 to fall out of fashion’¹¹. Yet, to secure his literary reputation, he dissociated himself from Gothic writers: having been a central figure in the establishment of the historical novel, Scott distanced himself from the Gothic.

Scott’s attraction toward Gothic fiction, however, is noticeable in the essays he wrote on Walpole, whose works were praised for their improbability. A crucial feature which was criticized by Anna Laetitia Barbauld, whose essay *On the Origin and Progress of Novel Writing* condemned the supernatural, favoring, instead, realist fiction: ‘[a] good novel is an epic in prose, with more of a character and less [...] of the supernatural machinery’¹² [...] If the stage is a mirror, so is the novel, and perhaps a more accurate

⁸ Gamer, *Romanticism*, 164.

⁹ Gamer, *Romanticism*, 165.

¹⁰ Fiona Robertson, *Legitimate Histories: Scott, Gothic, and the Authorities of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 56.

¹¹ Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 166.

¹² Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *On the Origin and Progress of Novel Writing*, 3. Accessed on 13th August 2021. <https://poetessarchive.org/critarchive/HTML/OriginProgBritNov1810.html>

one as less is sacrificed to effect and representation'¹³.

On the contrary, Scott believed that novels should allow supernatural situations, with particular attention to historical details. He insisted that the obstacle of Gothic fiction was its inaccuracy: unbelievable events threatened the authenticity of a work, damaging the seducing charm of mysterious and supernatural atmospheres. Therefore, the issue of this genre was not, as Barbauld argued, related to a kind of fiction that was not realist or serious, but depended on its lack of authentic, detailed, and believable situations, as this passage by Walter Scott attested:

[t]he difficulty of attaining this nice accuracy of delineation may be best estimated by comparing *The Castle of Otranto* with the less successful efforts of later writers; where, amid all their attempts to assume the tone of antique chivalry, something occurs in every chapter so decidedly incongruous, as at once reminds us of an ill-sustained masquerade, in which ghosts, knights-errant, magicians, and damsels gent, are all equipped in hired dresses from the same warehouse in Tavistock Street¹⁴.

Scott highlighted that the adoption of supernatural tools in Walpole's composition was legitimate, since the accuracy of details in his work expressed a rigorous attention to historical details, which evoked a believable setting for his novel. The 'later writers' were instead criticized for their inaccuracy: the lack of authenticity in their writings diminished the seductive power of supernatural, turning the '[t]one of antique chivalry' into an '[i]ll-sustained masquerade'. Indeed, Scott stressed that it seemed '[t]o have been Walpole's object to attain, by the minute accuracy of a fable, sketched with singular attention to the costume of the period in which the scene was laid, that same association which might prepare his reader's mind for the reception of prodigies'¹⁵.

Thus, in Scott's view, Walpole's ability to make the supernatural believable lied in

¹³ Barbauld, *Progress of Novel Writing*, 51

¹⁴ Walter Scott, *Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott, Bart*, vol. III (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1834), 316.

¹⁵ Scott, *Prose Works*, 314.

his competence in antiquarianism, by which he could evoke an authentic historical past. Walpole's power of evocation was praised for the '[a]ttention to the costume of the period' and the '[m]inute accuracy', and the author was described as a craftsman who could '[p]repare his reader's mind for the reception of prodigies'. Indeed, with these words Scott commented the result Walpole had accomplished: '[W]alpole has attained in [*The Castle of Otranto's*] composition, what, as an architect he must have felt beyond the power of his art'¹⁶.

Scott's esteem for Walpole influenced his career and his private life alike. It is no accident that both authors shared a common interest in antiquarianism, supernatural romance, and even a particular inclination to control all stages of literary production.

However, Walpole played a central role not only in inspiring Scott's literary attitude, but also in inspiring his taste during the construction of Abbotsford House, his famous residence situated in the Scottish Borders, near Galashiels, where the author lived between 1817 and 1825.

Like Walpole's Strawberry Hill, Scott's residence included Gothic elements, as well as antiques and old weapons, swords and guns in particular. With these words John Sutherland describes the interior of Abbotsford: '[i]nside, Scott's imagination ran wild. Suits of armour and old weaponry (guns, pistols, claymores, bugles, horns) covered the walls. He had a library-study, with secret recessed compartments [...] and commissioned paintings to celebrate his family history and lore'¹⁷. Outside, turrets and fringes expressed a Gothic taste which recalled Strawberry Hill, and therefore also the imaginary *Castle of Otranto*. Thus, Walpole's novel channeled Scott's Gothic predilections into the interior of Abbotsford as well as its external façade.

Furthermore, *The Castle of Otranto's* feature of presenting the novel as a translation of a true story set during the Crusade and narrated in a manuscript from the sixteenth century, was admired by Scott: the power of shaping the reader's opinion, as well as the central role of history, are yet further elements that modeled Scott's narration.

If Walpole's works and private life influenced the growth of Walter Scott as author, another Gothic writer that impressed and inspired him was Matthew Gregory Lewis. His

¹⁶ Scott, *Prose Works*, 315.

¹⁷ John Sutherland, *The Life of Sir Walter Scott: A Critical Biography* (New Jersey: Blackwell Publisher, 1995), 156.

importance in modelling Scott's authorial practice has been studied by Michael Gamer, who defines Scott as Lewis' '[m]ost successful pupil'¹⁸.

At the beginning of his career, Scott covered most of the genres that were promoted by Lewis, such as German tragedy, the supernatural ballad, and even Gothic drama and ghost story. He was so fond of German supernatural literature that, in 1795, he named his horse 'Lenore'¹⁹ to celebrate Gottfried August Bürger's famous poem. By the end of the eighteenth century, he had imitated more than five German dramas, and translated Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen*; after this publication, he produced a Gothic tragedy called *The House of Aspen*. He met Matthew Lewis in London, and their friendship contributed to the creation of *Tales of Wonder*, published by Lewis in 1801, in which were included several Scott's poems.

In the first years of his literary career, Scott considered himself a dramatist. However, unlike Lewis, Scott's dramatic works were not appreciated, and *The House of Aspen* was rejected by critics²⁰. Nevertheless, even if the unsuccessful attempt to have *The House of Aspen* staged may justify Scott's new commitment towards poetry, it did not clarify the reason why Scott abandoned his interest in translating English and German ballads²¹, which occurred in the same period.

Scott's correspondence revealed his hostility towards theater managers and highlighted why, after 1802, he decided to stop writing for the theater. He made clear that his hesitation also derived from the public's expectations: '[s]upposing your work to be in every respect as deserving of success as you could desire still you commit yourself to the taste or rather to the caprice of a mob of people assembled by no means from the best informed classes of society and even the very excellences of your piece may be hissed if they do not jump with their humour'²².

Scott's fear that his works could be 'hissed' appears frequently in his letters. In particular, the expression 'ridiculous' recurs in Scott's correspondences, underlining his worry about his public life and the attention he paid for his reputation. Therefore, the germ of his disinterest towards claiming the authorship of *Waverley* could already be

¹⁸ Gamer, *Romanticism*, 173.

¹⁹ Sutherland, *Life*, 64.

²⁰ Gamer, *Romanticism*, 173.

²¹ Sutherland, *Life*, 73.

²² Scott, *Letters*, 473.

found in the letters of the first years of the nineteenth century, when he refused any work that could undermine his reputation or expose him to ridicule.

Because of Lewis' scandal after the publication of *The Monk*, Scott decided to avoid any political and literary association with him, despite the similarity of their literary inclination and production. Moreover, between 1799 and 1803 he cultivated the friendship of renowned antiquarians, such as Robert Surtees and Richard Heber, and of anti-Jacobins like William Gifford. Scott's antiquarian interests and Tory politics were thus fundamental in shaping his new public life, whereas his early literary production based on supernatural ballads and Gothic drama would become potentially dangerous for his reputation. John Sutherland studied and analyzed Scott's situation: '[i]t was with the like of Canning, Gifford, Frere and Ellis [...] that Scott particularly wished to associate himself. [...] From this point on in his literary life, Scott became a witheringly sarcastic commentator on his early "German mad" productions, of which he had once been so proud as to make a love-gift to Williamina Belsches'²³.

Scott's friends, some of whom became his collaborators in the second part of his career, condemned his early compositions, and several poems like *The Eve of St. John*, *Frederick and Alice*, *Glenfinlas* and *The Fire King*, included in Lewis' *Tales of Wonder*, were rejected as belonging to his 'early German mad productions'. Therefore, Scott himself supported the numerous parodies following *Tales of Wonder*'s publication and vowed never again to produce '[G]ermanized brats'²⁴ for the stage or press.

Kenneth Curry, in a letter to Scott, tried to revalue his poems by blaming Lewis for his terrible use of Scott's admirable compositions: '[I] have observed the use of Mr. Lewis made of your beautiful poems and am sorry for it. [...] I am happy you are going to intersperse your poems in your projected publication where they will appear to much greater advantage when relieved by the real language of manners and poetry of the "Olden times"'²⁵. Curry judged *Tales of Wonder* as a very injudicious publication and after the public's reception of his collaboration with Lewis, Scott was bent on keeping distance from any association with Gothic writers or fiction. He noted that '[g]hosts [...] have of late been put out of fashion by a promiscuous and ill-judged introduction of

²³ Sutherland, *Life*, 74.

²⁴ Scott, *Letters*, 118.

²⁵ Scott, *Letters*, 103.

tales relating to them'²⁶ and his later publications confirmed his determination in signing only respectable works of poetry and literary scholarship.

In 1802 he published the first two volumes of *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, a genuine work of antiquarian research: Scott's will to claim Bishop Thomas Percy, the author of *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, as the main influence of his work, underlined his intention of distancing his public figure from that of Lewis. The positive reception of the two volumes, which included essays and ancient ballads, encouraged Scott to publish a third one in 1803.

This edition added ballads by antiquarians such as John Leyden and Robert Jamieson, and Scott even included a ballad by Lewis: as expected, he chose a work without any connection with Gothic or supernatural imagery. However, Michael Gamer argues that this could be defined as a '[g]esture of thanks for Lewis' publication of Scott's ballads the year before'²⁷. Some of Scott's ballads in the *Tales of Wonder* were republished in the third volume of *Minstrelsy*, such as *The Eve of St. John* and *Glenfinlas*. The new edition of these works provided introductions and detailed notes to each poem: not only did Scott present his rejected poems in a new version, but he also highlighted his knowledge in both literary tradition and local history.

As a result, the republishing of *The Eve of St. John* and *Glenfinlas* granted Scott's poems a new significance and cultural status: they '[c]eased being tales of wonder exploiting already-sated Gothic readers and became respectful homages "after the genuine old English model"'²⁸.

²⁶ Scott, *Letters*, 118.

²⁷ Gamer, *Romanticism*, 175.

²⁸ Gamer, *Romanticism*, 176.

2.2 On Walpole, Reeve, Radcliffe, and Hoffmann

In *Lives of the Novelists*, Scott presented Horace Walpole as the son of Sir Robert Walpole, a Minister who ‘[h]eld the reins of government under two successive monarchs, with a grasp so firm and uncontrolled that his power seemed entwined with the rights of the Brunswick family’²⁹. Horace Walpole was born in 1717 and educated at Eton: here, he cultivated a friendship with the famous poet Thomas Gray, which continued in the following years at Cambridge’s King’s College. In 1739, Gray accompanied Walpole on his Grand Tour of Europe, a 17th and 18th century practice of upper-class men traveling around Europe to celebrate their coming of age. After their trip through Europe together, the break of their friendship was due to Walpole’s disagreement with Gray’s ‘[f]ormal opinions and habits of [a] man of letters’³⁰. However, some years later, Walpole took responsibility for their separation and a reconciliation was possible: they remained friends until Gray’s death, occurred in 1771.

When Walpole returned to England, in 1741, he was elected Member of Parliament for the Whig Party, and ‘[e]ntered public life as the son of a Prime Minister as powerful as England had known for more than a century’³¹. In 1745 Sir Robert Walpole died and left Horace with three sinecure offices: with these financial benefits, he could maintain a high rank in society and, in 1758, decided to retire from public life and pursue his literary career. Walpole’s studies were inspired by his European travel, which shaped his appreciation of fine arts. Nonetheless, his ‘[a]nimated imagination’ led him towards the branch of study of ‘[g]othic history and antiquities’³², as Scott put it.

Walpole’s antiquarian research was accurate and meticulous, revealing an uncommon taste for English antiquities, as his *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of King Richard III* demonstrated. However, as his interest towards Gothic culture increased, his villa too gradually turned into a pseudo-feudal castle. The inclusion of towers, fretted roofs, galleries and corridors at Strawberry Hill, displayed his enthusiasm for Gothic style. Patterns collected from monuments and cathedrals, and applied to windows and ceilings, were realized to please his own taste, not a temporary fashion. Therefore, his studies inspired by foreign literature and antiquarianism, were

²⁹ Scott, *Lives*, 178.

³⁰ Scott, *Lives*, 179.

³¹ *Ibidem*

³² Scott, *Lives*, 180.

also influenced by his new taste in architecture³³.

When *The Castle of Otranto* was published in 1764, Walpole's narrative incorporated every aspect on which its author had worked after his retirement from public life. Scott noted that not only did he '[c]ontribut[e] to rescue [the Gothic style] from the bad fame into which it had fallen'³⁴, but he also '[gave] the public a specimen of the Gothic style adapted to modern literature, as he had already exhibited its application to modern architecture'³⁵. Walpole's work, for Scott, was '[r]emarkable, not only for the wild interest of the story, but as the first modern attempt to found a tale of amusing fiction upon the basis of the ancient romances of chivalry'³⁶. Furthermore, Scott defined Walpole an '[i]ngenious author', '[a] man of excellent taste' and '[t]he best letter-writer in the English language'³⁷.

Thomas Gray's words, in a letter he wrote to Walpole, underlined the general positive reception of *The Castle of Otranto* at Pembroke College in Cambridge, where Gray was professor: '[I] have received *The Castle of Otranto*, and return you my thanks for it. It engages our attention here (i.e. at Cambridge), makes some of us cry a little; and all, in general, afraid to go to bed o' nights. We take it for a translation; and should believe it to be a true story, if it were not for St. Nicholas'³⁸.

Therefore, Walpole's Gothic novel was praised as an important work which was essential for the development of Gothic fiction³⁹ and also displayed the genius and competence of the author in antiquarianism, Gothic architecture, as well as Gothic style and his application to modern literature. As Scott observed, Walpole had a wide range of expertise and influences, and '[h]is works [bore] evidence to his talents'⁴⁰.

Many writers tried to achieve Walpole's results by imitating *The Castle of Otranto*: among them, Scott mentioned Reeve who, despite her genius, was not able to reach her goal, for many reasons regarding supernatural machinery, historical accuracy and the 'feminine' nature of her writings, as we have seen in the previous chapter.

³³ Matthew M. Reeve, *Gothic Architecture, Sexuality, and License at Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill* (The Art Bulletin 95-3, 2013), 412-4.

³⁴ Scott, *Lives*, 178.

³⁵ Scott, *Lives*, 182.

³⁶ Scott, *Lives*, 177.

³⁷ Scott, *Lives*, 186.

³⁸ Thomas Gray, *Letter to Horace Walpole, December 30, 1764*, quoted in Scott, *Lives*, 183.

³⁹ Crystal B. Lake, *Bloody Records: Manuscripts and Politics in The Castle of Otranto* (Modern Philology 110-4, May 2013), 491.

⁴⁰ Scott, *Lives*, 186.

In his *Lives of the Novelists*, Scott introduced Clara Reeve as the ‘[i]ngenious authoress of the Old English Baron’ and the ‘[d]aughter of the Reverend William Reeve, M.A., Rector of Freston, and of Kerton, in Suffolk, and perpetual Curate of St. Nicholas’⁴¹. In a letter to a friend, Reeve had described the influence that his father had in shaping his literary knowledge:

[f]rom him I have learned all that I know; he was my oracle; he used to make me read the parliamentary debates while he smoked his pipe after supper. I gaped and yawned over them at the time, but, unawares to myself, they fixed my principles once and for ever. He made me read Rapiu's *History of England*; the information it gave made amends for its dryness. I read Cato's *Letters*, by Trenchard and Gordon; I read the Greek and Roman Histories, and *Plutarch's Lives*; all these at an age when few people of either sex can read their name⁴².

Thus, from an early age, Reeve showed her penchant for literary studies; her later novels were ‘[f]avourably received’, as Scott stated: in his opinion, her novels were ‘[a]ll marked by excellent good sense [...] and a competent command of those qualities which constitute a good romance’⁴³. However, her fame was due to the publication of *The Old English Baron*, the ‘[l]iterary offspring of *The Castle of Otranto*’, as Reeve herself defined her work.

Reeve revisited Walpole’s novel because she condemned the supernatural machinery employed by the latter. As she argued, ‘[a] ghost, to be admitted as an ingredient in romance, must behave himself like ghosts of sober demeanour, and subject himself to the common rules still preserved in grange and hall, as circumscribing beings of his description’⁴⁴. Scott denied her limited view of supernatural machinery, observing that ‘[i]f we are to try ghosts by the ordinary rules of humanity, we bar them of their privileges entirely. For instance, why admit the existence of an aerial phantom, and deny it the terrible attribute of magnifying its stature? Why admit an enchanted helmet,

⁴¹ Scott, *Lives*, 197.

⁴² Clara Reeve, *Letter to a friend*, quoted in Scott, *Lives*, 197.

⁴³ Scott, *Lives*, 199.

⁴⁴ Scott, *Lives*, 200.

and not a gigantic one?’⁴⁵.

Reeve’s fault, in Scott’s opinion, lied with her lack of imagination, a quality which was absent not only from *The Old English Baron*, but also from any of Reeve’s novels. Therefore, her works were defined as ‘[o]rdinary fiction’, described in detail by Scott as ‘[a]greeable, but neither marked by high flights of fancy, nor strong bursts of passion’⁴⁶.

Scott also argued that what differentiated *The Castle of Otranto* from *The Old English Baron* was Walpole’s acquaintance with the manners of the Middle Ages. In *The Castle of Otranto*, Walpole’s attention to details helped the reader to accept the fantastique and grotesque setting of the novel. The language, style, and costume imitated the manners of the chivalrous period in which the scenes were laid: the particular attention to dialogues, tones of characters belonging to different social classes, and even the description of their dresses, not only did they provide an atmosphere which was prescribed to a particular period of history, but they also derived from an accurate knowledge of Middle Ages. On the contrary, Reeve’s novel presented characters who ‘[s]p[oke] and act[ed] much in the fashion of the seventeenth century, employ[ed] the same phrases of courtesy, and adopt[ed] the same tone of conversation’⁴⁷. This feature underlined both Reeve’s limited knowledge of the chivalrous period and manners, and Walpole’s exceptional and preferable competence as a writer and antiquarian, in Scott’s view.

Nonetheless, Scott highlighted a significant aspect of *The Old English Baron*: he argued that the advantage of Reeve’s writing was that it expressed the feelings and emotions of her characters in a clearer way than Walpole’s novel, since she employed manners and costumes of modern times. Walpole’s work, more ambitious and difficult than Reeve’s, was therefore restricted to cultured readers, who could understand and appreciate the historic details offered by the novel. Nevertheless, *The Castle of Otranto* remained the best example of Gothic fiction: its peculiar characters, style, and language, was imitated by Reeve’s novel with mediocre and unsatisfactory results, derived from poor imagination and inaccurate details.

If Scott admired Walpole for his remarkable imagination, he labelled Clara Reeve, on

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁶ Scott, *Lives*, 201.

⁴⁷ Scott, *Lives*, 203.

the contrary, as an imitator, one of those ‘[l]ater writers’⁴⁸ who attempted to emulate *The Castle of Otranto* without success. Scott believed that Reeve possessed pure morality and competence to write a good romance, however she could not stand comparison with great authors like Walpole:

[i]t was scarce to be expected that the amiable and accomplished authoress, in her secluded situation, and with acquaintance of events and characters derived from books alone, should have rivalled those authors who gathered their knowledge of the human hearts from having, like Fielding and Smollett, become acquainted, by sad experience [...] Nor was it to be thought that she should have emulated in this particular Walpole, who, as a statesman, a poet, and a man of the world ‘who knew the world like a man’, has given much individual character to his sketch of Manfred. What we here speak of is not the deficiency in the style and costume, but a certain creeping and low line of narrative and sentiment⁴⁹.

The passage underlines Scott’s belief that Gothic was a masculine genre, focused on bold and daring elements concerning an audacious use of the supernatural, and embodied by figures like Lewis and Walpole⁵⁰. In fact, Scott’s tendency to stress the ‘feminine’ nature of Reeve’s writings by referring to her as an ‘[a]uthoress’ is a clear hint of Scott’s masculine criteria. Indeed, Radcliffe’s ability to write Gothic stories was compared by Scott himself to Walpole’s supernatural narrative and earned her the title of ‘[a]uthor’. Reeve’s talent was thus recognized but described as limited to the capacity of a female writer. The moment she trespassed the line by criticizing the excess of supernatural devices in Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, Scott observed with irony:

[i]t seems to be Miss Reeve’s argument, that there is a verge of probability, which even the most violent figment must not transgress; but we reply by the cross question, that if we are once to subject our preternatural agents to the limits of human reason, where are we to

⁴⁸ Scott, *Prose Works*, 316.

⁴⁹ Scott, *Prose Works*, 334.

⁵⁰ Gamer, *Romanticism*, 169.

stop? [...] Where, then, may the reader ask, is the line to be drawn? Or what are the limits to be placed to the reader's credulity, when those of common sense and ordinary nature are once exceeded?⁵¹

Scott then affirmed that, considering the doubts and uncertainties advanced by Reeve, only one answer was permitted:

[t]he question admits only one answer, namely, that the author himself, being in fact the magician, shall evoke no spirits whom he is not capable of endowing with manners and language corresponding to their supernatural character. Thus Shakspeare, drawing such characters as Caliban and Ariel, gave them reality, not by appealing to actual opinions which his audience might entertain respecting the possibility or impossibility of their existence, but by investing them with such attributes as all readers and spectators recognized as those which must have corresponded to such extraordinary beings, had their existence been possible.⁵²

Scott's reply stressed the absolute '[a]uthority of the author', who is the only one capable of knowing the limits of the supernatural in his work. Thus, Reeve's need to limit the extravagance and excess found in *The Castle of Otranto* is for Scott another instance of Reeve's inferiority: this is ultimately what separates Walpole, a great author who knew how to employ the supernatural machinery, from Reeve, an imitator who could not manage an audacious use of the supernatural.

Although Radcliffe's private life resembled Reeve's, since she spent most of her existence in domestic privacy among relatives and friends, in her case Scott did not believe that her secluded situation had a negative effect on her works, for '[t]he fame of her writings was brilliant and universal'⁵³.

Ann Radcliffe was born on 9 July 1764, in London. Daughter of William Ward, a haberdasher, and Ann Oates, since her childhood she gave proof of her literary

⁵¹ Scott, *Prose Works*, 328.

⁵² Scott, *Prose Works*, 329-30.

⁵³ Scott, *Lives*, 302.

inclination, studying Latin and Greek classics. In 1789, when she was twenty-four years old, she published *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, by which she became known to the public as a novelist. The romance gave hints of the author's unique talent by presenting a narration set in Scotland during the dark ages, but '[w]ithout any attempt to trace either the peculiar manners or scenery of the country'; however, as Scott noted, in this work '[s]ome germs of that taste [...] for the wild, romantic, and mysterious, which the authoress afterwards employed with such effect'⁵⁴ could be traced. *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, for Scott, was thus an unrefined and amateurish writing which displayed what the genius of Radcliffe could do; however, he argued that this work could not be considered '[o]n the whole, as by any means worthy of her pen'⁵⁵.

In 1790, she attracted the attention of the public with the publication of *The Sicilian Romance*. Here the characters were greatly improved and the fertility of her imagination was displayed in the adventurous narration: these were the principal characteristics which fascinated the public and which raised her above the common crowd of novelists. Being the first to have introduced a '[t]one of fanciful description [...] which had hitherto been exclusively applied to poetry', Radcliffe was considered '[t]he first poetess of romantic fiction, that is, if actual rhythm shall not be deemed essential to poetry'⁵⁶.

Despite the exaggerated expectations of the public, Radcliffe stood the test, publishing *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in 1794. The author's popularity was heightened, and the critics were captivated by the fascinating title and mysterious atmosphere of the novel. The similarities with her precedent work, *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), were noticeable: they both presented a heroine in distress, separated from her object of affection by a tyrannical guardian, and confined inside a decadent tower, where she witnessed supernatural forces. Nonetheless, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* developed on a larger scale these elements, and with better results. The terrifying descriptions and supernatural machinery fascinated the public, which considered this novel as a step beyond Radcliffe's former works. Her last novel, *The Italian*, was published in 1797: with this work, Radcliffe demonstrated not only her genius as a writer, but also her attachment towards the supernatural and mysterious narration. The scenes of horror

⁵⁴ Scott, *Lives*, 304.

⁵⁵ Scott, *Lives*, 305.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

were sustained by a violent and religious institution like the Holy Inquisition; in addition, a religious setting like the Vatican dungeons provided the author with intriguing characters and settings, which helped Radcliffe to build scenes bordering on the supernatural.

Though Scott argued that, in her last novel, Radcliffe ‘[d]id not intimately understand the language and manners of Italy’, he noted that this deficiency was resolved by her excellent descriptions, which ‘[p]rove[d] how well she knew how to paint Italian scenery, which she could only have seen in the pictures of Claude or Poussin’⁵⁷. Therefore, Radcliffe’s vivid imagination was interpreted by Scott as her most important quality: ‘[s]ome artists are distinguished by precision and correctness of outline, others by the force and vividness of their colouring; and it is to the latter class that this author belongs’⁵⁸.

Unlike Clara Reeve, Scott celebrated Ann Radcliffe for her originality and cleverness, and mentioned her as a major writer like Walpole. Even if she could not measure up to Walpole’s works, the two writers were both defined as author-magicians. Scott’s accurate attempt to separate Radcliffe’s accomplishments from the works of her imitators revealed his recognition of Radcliffe’s genius, as his words attest: ‘[the] increasing degradation of the public taste which [...] gorged upon the wild and improbable fictions of an overheated imagination [was caused by] the crowd of copyists who came forward in imitation of Mrs. Radcliffe, and assumed her magic wand, without having the power of wielding it with effect’⁵⁹.

Radcliffe, described once again as both an author and magician, was defined as the only capable of wielding ‘[h]er magic wand’: not only did this expression underline her talent, but it also noticed the difference between her works and the fiction of the ‘[c]rowd of copyists’.

Despite Scott’s recognition of Radcliffe as a major writer, Scott insisted that she could not stand comparison with Horace Walpole, for reasons similar to Reeve. The explained supernatural, one of the main features of Radcliffe’s fiction, was not understood by Scott as an improvement of the Gothic romance but, on the contrary, as a

⁵⁷ Scott, *Lives*, 316.

⁵⁸ Scott, *Lives*, 332.

⁵⁹ Scott, *Prose Works*, 362.

compromise that weakened the suggestive power of supernatural:

[M]rs. Radcliffe, a name not to be mentioned without the high respect due to genius, has endeavoured to effect a compromise between those different styles of narrative [...], by referring her prodigies to an explanation founded on natural causes, in the latter chapters of her romances. To this improvement upon the Gothic romance there are so many objections, that we own ourselves inclined to prefer, as more simple and impressive, the narrative of Walpole, which details supernatural incidents as they would have been readily believed and received in the eleventh and twelfth century⁶⁰.

In addition, Scott inveighed against those '[e]xplanation[s] founded on natural causes' and argued that '[t]he precaution of relieving our spirit from the influence of supposed supernatural terror, seems [...] unnecessary in a work of professed fiction'⁶¹.

Scott's critique of Radcliffe's writing was therefore similar to the one advanced toward Reeve's works and both these female authors, even if celebrated for their talent, were classified in a lower order than Walpole's. While Radcliffe inspired a '[g]erm of superstition', Scott argued, Walpole evoked '[t]he sensation of supernatural awe [...] that secret and reserved feeling of love for the marvellous and supernatural'⁶². Thus, Reeve's concept of probability and Radcliffe's explained supernatural were both condemned as too '[p]recautious' elements which, for Scott, belonged to the generic category of women's writing⁶³, identified by a prudent narration and lack of imagination.

Scott's opinion toward the supernatural were displayed not only in his analysis of the Gothic novels. Some of the elements contained in his studies of Gothic writers such as Walpole, Reeve and Radcliffe, were developed in his essay *On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition, and in particularly in the works of E.T.A. Hoffmann* too, published in 1827. As the title of this work suggests, Scott's interest in the occult and

⁶⁰ Scott, *Prose Works*, 316.

⁶¹ Scott, *Prose Works*, 317.

⁶² Scott, *Prose Works*, 313.

⁶³ Gamer, *Romanticism*, 170.

paranormal extended beyond Gothic literature. This time he focused his attention on a short story by the Romantic writer Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann.

Scott opened his essay with the following words:

[n]o source of romantic fiction, and no mode of exciting the feelings of interest which the authors in that description of literature desire to produce, seems more directly accessible than the love of the supernatural. It is common to all classes of mankind, and perhaps is to none so familiar as to those who assume a certa degree of scepticism on the subject; since the reader may have often observed in conversation, that the person who professes himself most incredulous on the subject of marvellous stories, often ends his remarks by indulging the company with some well-attested anecdote, which it is difficult or impossible to account for on the narrator's own principles of absolute scepticism⁶⁴.

Once again Scott introduced the supernatural machinery as a feature that could be related to both fascination and scepticism, two components which were intertwined in Scott's conception of paranormal. Indeed, Scott argued that the origin of superstition lied in '[t]he principles of our nature' which could be found in '[o]ur holy religion'⁶⁵. Scott noted that Christians believed that the Divine Power manifested itself more vividly in the past rather than in modern times, and this was due to the technological progress of mankind in recent centuries: '[t]he belief in prodigies and supernatural events has gradually declined in proportion to the advancement of human knowledge'. Scott's words indicated that the '[w]ell-attested [supernatural] anecdotes' of his time were so few because of the scepticism of the modern society, which even '[i]dentified [the marvelous] with fabulous'⁶⁶. Therefore, everything related to supernatural incidents became associated with fables, rather than with situations in which the laws of nature were altered.

The marvellous and fabulous were labeled as elements of children literature: thus, the

⁶⁴ Walter Scott, *On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition, and in particularly in the works of E.T.A. Hoffmann* (London: The Foreign Quarterly Review, 1827), 60. Last accessed in June 2018. http://www.artandpopularculture.com/On_the_Supernatural_in_Fictitious_Composition

⁶⁵ Scott, *On the Supernatural*, 60.

⁶⁶ Scott, *On the Supernatural*, 62.

novels had to employ the supernatural cautiously. In fact, Scott quoted renowned authors such as Shakespeare, Burke, and Milton, who excited, but not gratified, the imagination of the reader. Scott observed that those acclaimed writers described ghosts and other supernatural presences with the help of dark settings and undefined forms; so, what was necessary to generate terror was the lack of clarity, ambiguity, and uncertainty. The supernatural in fiction required to be rarefied and indistinct: as Scott argued, '[e]ven in Hamlet, the second entrance of the ghost is not nearly so impressive as the first'⁶⁷.

Nevertheless, the Brothers Grimm in 1816 published *Deutsche Sagen*, a collection of various traditions and tales from different parts of Germany, which displayed the popular superstition through an accumulation of exaggerated supernatural situations. Scott's judgement of Grimm's tales could be nothing but negative: in fact, he defined Grimm's work as 'trite', 'tiresome', and 'childish', arguing that a '[w]hole collection of ghost stories inclines us little to fear as a jest book moves us to laughter'⁶⁸. However, in his essay on the supernatural, he chose *Deutsche Sagen* among many other writings, because he defined it as '[a] step in the history of the human race'⁶⁹. Indeed, Scott described the Brothers Grimm as 'antiquarians' who, interested in the simplicity of local legends, collected proofs of popular superstition: even if their enthusiasm for German traditions generated a volume in which supernatural encounters were frequent and unrealistic, *Deutsche Sagen* was acclaimed as an admirable work.

Through the medium of translation, many other German stories of the supernatural became popular in England, such as *Peter Schlemihls* (1814) by Adelbert von Chamisso, and *The Devil's Elixir* (1815) by Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann. The latter was identified by Scott as the author who paved the way to the Fantastic style of composition, which was treated in Scott's essay: for this reason, the historical novelist dedicated most part of it to the analysis of the life and works of Hoffmann.

On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition discussed Hoffmann as a writer of rare talent: he was a poet, an artist, a musician, and became one of the major authors of the Romantic movement. However, Scott's presentation of Hoffmann focused on his

⁶⁷ Scott, *On the Supernatural*, 63.

⁶⁸ Scott, *On the Supernatural*, 67.

⁶⁹ Scott, *On the Supernatural*, 68.

whimsical and hypochondriac disposition⁷⁰, which ‘[c]arried him to extremes in all his undertakings; so his music became capricious, his drawings caricatures, and his tales, as he himself termed them, fantastic extravagances’⁷¹. Indeed, Scott’s essay stressed Hoffmann’s mental status, who also consumed considerable quantity of wine and tobacco: his genius was, for Scott, weakened and damaged by his misconduct and his obsession for the occult and the imaginary world.

Scott’s essay described the physical appearance of Hoffmann too, which, for Scott, could give a further hint of the state of the nervous system of the author of *The Devil’s Elixir*:

[a] very little man with a quantity of dark-brown hair, and eyes looking through his elflocks, that indicated that touch of mental derangement, of which he seems to have been himself conscious, when entering the following fearful memorandum in his diary: ‘Why, in sleeping and in walking, do I, in my thoughts, dwell upon the subject of insanity? The outpouring of the wild ideas that arise in my mind may perhaps operate like the breathing of a vein’⁷².

Thus, Hoffmann’s imagination was ill-regulated and had ‘[a]n undue tendency to the horrible and the distressins’⁷³: his visions were stated to be so lively that he was incapable of distinguishing between reality and fantasy. In the night, which was his time of study, Hoffmann was frequently visited by ghosts: his wife was accustomed to protect him from the supernatural presences, by sitting by him while he was writing. Once he calmed down, she used to help him understand that they were just figments of his own imagination, so that he could continue his work without further interruptions.

His writings were therefore influenced by his own fantasies, which led him ‘[t]oo much beyond the circle not only of probability but even of possibility’⁷⁴, a critique which once again related the supernatural machinery with the idea of probability. In

⁷⁰ Christopher R. Clason, *Narrative «Teasing»: Withholding Closure in Hoffmann’s Elixiere Des Teufels* (Colloquia Germanica, 42, no. 1, 2009), 81. Clason argued that Scott’s comments on Hoffmann’s works ‘damned [his] novel[s] to relative obscurity for decades’.

⁷¹ Scott, *On the Supernatural*, 74.

⁷² Scott, *On the Supernatural*, 75.

⁷³ Scott, *On the Supernatural*, 81.

⁷⁴ Scott, *On the Supernatural*, 93.

fact, if on the one hand Scott criticized Clara Reeve for her limited imagination, on the other he did not tolerate the excess of Hoffmann's extravagances, which transgressed even the limits of possibility.

Der Sandmann (1815) was studied by Scott to illustrate the consequences of the unpleasant condition of the author in his works⁷⁵. Hoffmann's short story showed his genius in his introduction of the fantastic and the uncanny⁷⁶ in the interesting character of Nathaniel; however, as Scott argued, it '[e]xhaust[ed] itself upon themes which cannot be reconciled to taste'⁷⁷.

The story opens with Nathaniel, who recalls an episode of his childhood: he was terrified by the Sandman, who was believed to steal the eyeballs of children who refused to go to bed early. He associated this legendary figure with Coppelius, a friend of his father. When the latter died of a flaming explosion, Coppelius left the city; however, it was not long after that a barometer-seller named Giuseppe Coppola arrived in town. Later, Nathaniel falls in love with Olympia, but when he realizes that she is an automaton, he also finds out that Coppola is actually Coppelius: in state of insanity, Nathaniel is taken to an asylum. Once recovered from his madness, he marries Clara, his previous fiancée, and during their visit to Nathaniel's hometown, the two lovers climb the steeple to enjoy the view. The young husband, looking through the lens of the spyglass he bought from Coppola, suddenly goes mad: believing Clara is an automaton, Nathaniel dies falling from the tower. Coppelius appears in the crowd that gathers, and after seeing the lifeless body of Nathaniel, he disappears once again.

Scott argued that '[i]t is impossible to subject tales of this nature to criticism. They are not the visions of a poetical mind, [...] they are the feverish dreams of a lightheaded patient'⁷⁸. The scene in which Coppelius takes sparkling masses out of the fire and shapes them into human faces without eyes, and the episode of the vanishing of the burns to the face of Nathaniel's father after his death, are just two examples which

⁷⁵ Ursula Mahlendorf, *E. T. A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman": The Fictional Psycho-Biography of a Romantic Poet* (American Imago 32, no. 3, 1975), 239. Mahlendorf added that *Der Sandmann* showed 'how thin the line is which divides [...] creativity from pathology'.

⁷⁶ Mahlendorf, *Sandman*, 217. Freud, in his essay *The Uncanny* (1919), did not dismiss the protagonist's fantasies as products of a madman's imagination, unlike many literary critics. On the contrary, *Der Sandmann* displayed the concept of the uncanny, which also influenced the 20th century Gothic literature.

⁷⁷ Scott, *On the Supernatural*, 94.

⁷⁸ Scott, *On the Supernatural*, 97.

underlined Hoffmann's immoderate use of supernatural machinery⁷⁹. Coppelius and Coppola, being two different men, a German and an Italian, could not possibly be the same person; likewise, Nathaniel could not fall in love with an automaton without knowing its real nature. Therefore, the exaggeration and accumulation of too many fantastic elements weaken the fascination and mystery of the supernatural, which required '[t]he assistance of medicine rather than of criticism'. Indeed, Scott observed that Hoffmann's hallucinations, which influenced his writing, were produced by the immoderate use of opium. *Der Sandmann* was thus rejected because of its '[w]ild and absurd story', which was partly rehabilitated by some features of Clara's character, '[w]hose firmness, plain good sense and frank affection are placed in agreeable contrast with the wild imagination, fanciful apprehensions, and extravagant affection of her crazy-pated admirer'⁸⁰.

Hoffmann's works were condemned by Scott because of the influence his own imagination⁸¹, '[s]o little under the dominion of sober reason'⁸². Hoffmann, described by Scott as an extraordinary person, a remarkable man and a close observer of nature, could have distinguished himself with his works, but his life was shortened '[n]ot only by his mental malady [...] but also by the indulgences to which he had recourse in order to secure himself against the melancholy, which operated so deeply upon the constitution of his mind'⁸³. Hoffmann's works confounded the supernatural with the absurd, reducing the power of imagination to irrational and charmless stories: thus, Scott defined *Der Sandmann* as a work which displayed how the most fertile fancy could be '[e]xhausted by the lavish prodigality of its possessor'⁸⁴.

⁷⁹ Maria M. Tatar, *E.T.A. Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann": Reflection and Romantic Irony* (MLN 95, no. 3, 1980): 593-8.

⁸⁰ Scott, *On the Supernatural*, 97.

⁸¹ Tatar, *Hoffmann*, 586.

⁸² Scott, *On the Supernatural*, 82.

⁸³ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁴ Scott, *On the Supernatural*, 93.

3. THE OLD ENGLISH BARON

3.1 Publication and Reception

An accurate analysis of *The Old English Baron* requires an in-depth research on the condition of female writers in the eighteenth century and on the misinterpretation of Reeve's figure and writings. Reeve's literary career underlines all these premises which offer a better understanding of *The Old English Baron*, highlighting its various facets, strengths and even weaknesses.

Reeve's literary debut with *Original Poems on Several Occasions* in 1769 displayed both the harsh environment in which writers had to work and the misconceptions about her figure. That volume opened with a dedication to the Honorable Mrs. Stratford, which expressed Reeve's respect of her rank and position; however, in the section *Address to the reader*, the tone of the author differed from the previous one.

Indeed, Reeve clarified that the purpose of her work was to publish two oratorios on biblical subjects; however, both had an unfortunate outcome. *On Ruth*, the first one, was accepted by a composer who, before Reeve could finish her work, rejected it in favor of an already concluded text by another writer. The second one, *On Absalom's Rebellion*, was refused because once again the composer accepted a rival work on the same subject. Eventually, Reeve was convinced by her friends to include new poems in the volume, and her work was published despite the numerous obstacles. The change of tones in *Original Poems on Several Occasions* and the story of its publication reveal the challenging condition in which writers, especially female authors, had to work, and Reeve's attitude towards both high-ranked people and the future of her writings.

Emma Clery defines Reeve as an author who was '[a]t once the most confiding and defensive of writers'¹. As Clery also argues, '[t]oo often she has been dismissed as having about her a tiresome odour of sanctity'². However, Reeve was not only a conservative writer; on the contrary, her works also displayed a spirited irony and even

¹ Emma J. Clery, *Women's Gothic: from Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley* (Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers, 2004), 25.

² *Ibidem*.

stressed the nonsensical prejudices that the eighteenth-century critics had about works written by female writers.

To my friend Mrs.-----, a poem written in 1756 and included in *Original Poems on Several Occasions*, shows Reeve's experience as a female writer: the inferiority of women in the literary field was displayed by the author, who satirized and condemned men's prejudices. In the poem *The Sacred Heliconian Spring*, Reeve writes:

See what success my labours crowned,
By birds and beasts alike disowned.
Those talents, that were once my pride,
I find it requisite to hide;
For what in man is most respected,
In woman's form shall be rejected³.

In the opening *Address to the Reader of Original Poems on Several Occasions*, Reeve develops once again this theme, this time with a more optimistic view on the subject, and celebrated the success of other female writers:

[I] formerly believed, that I ought not to let myself be known for a scribbler, that my sex was an insuperable objection, that mankind in general were prejudiced against its pretensions to literary merit; but I am now convinced of the mistake, by daily examples to the contrary. I see many female writers favourably received, admitted into the ranks of authors, and amply rewarded by the public; I have been encouraged by their success, to offer myself as a candidate for the fame advantages⁴.

Reeve's positive attitude towards female writers led her to publish *The Phoenix*, a translation of *Argenis*, a romance written in Latin by John Barclay in 1772. This publication highlighted her passion for history and Latin, subjects which she studied since she was a child; indeed, it also underlined her interest in the genre of romance, which later produced *The Old English Baron*. Nonetheless, throughout her literary

³ Clara Reeve, *Original Poems on Several Occasions* (London: J.W. Pasham, 1769), 11.

⁴ Reeve, *Original*, XI.

career, Reeve always remained a ‘defensive writer’: even after the publication of *Original Poems on Several Occasions*, signed ‘C.R.’, the work *The Phoenix* was published ‘by a Lady’, whereas *The Old English Baron* in anonymity. According to Reeve, her condition as a woman prevented her from establishing herself in the literary world: despite her classical studies, her refined education and literary preparation, which could have led her to success, her failure was due to the simple fact of being a woman. Indeed, in her poem *Elegy*, Reeve herself defined her imagination and sensibility as a ‘[r]ay of Genius’⁵ which ‘[d]isdain and Fortune’ had unfortunately ‘[c]ongeal’d to snow’⁶. As a result, Reeve’s *The Old English Baron* was published anonymously at the author’s expense in 1777, by a Colchester printer. The title of the first edition was *The Champion of Virtue: A Gothic Story*; however, after Mrs. Bridgen, Samuel Richardson’s daughter, edited the novel, a second edition with Reeve’s name on the title page was published in 1778, and under the title for which Reeve’s most celebrated work is known today.

The main plot of *The Old English Baron* is relatively simple. The story, set in fifteenth-century England, opens with Sir Philip Harclay who leaves for the castle of Lord Lovel, his dear friend, with the aim of discovering what happened to him, since he has not been responding to his letters for a long time. At the castle, he learns that his friend died following King Henry VI in an expedition in Wales; his pregnant wife died from grief before giving birth to their child, so the ownership of the castle passed to a cousin who sold it to his brother-in-law, Baron Fitz-Owen. At Lovel castle, Sir Philip Harclay meets Edmund Twyford, the son of a peasant who is brought up as a companion of Lord Fitz-Owen’s sons: treated as a member of the family, he was given the same education of the Baron’s children and trained in knightly skills. However, Edmund, a good-looking, brilliant, and intelligent young man, incurs the enmity of the Baron’s relatives, especially that of Robert, the eldest son of Lord Fitz-Owen. Despite Edmund’s attempt to distinguish himself on a military campaign, and the support of Father Oswald, William and Emma Fitz-Owen, and an old servant of the Lovels named Joseph, he is isolated in an abandoned wing of the castle where he must demonstrate his

⁵ Reeve, *Original Poems*, 3, line 36.

⁶ Reeve, *Original*, 3, line 35.

courage and loyalty to the family. This place is said to be haunted by ghosts and no one dares to set foot there, due to the frightening noises and supernatural apparitions. Therefore, if Edmund manages to sleep for three consecutive nights in that deserted wing, he will prove his boldness and will be able to reunite with the family of his benefactor. In those rooms, he discovers to be the son of the former Lord Lovel. Sir Philip Harclay, after learning the truth from Edmund, challenges the present and actual Lord Lovel to trial by duel. After Philip's victory, Edmund's real identity is revealed to the Fitz-Owen family, and the story ends with Edmund's establishment in Lovel castle.

The public response to *The Champion of Virtue: A Gothic Story* was favorable. In the *Monthly Review* for January 1778, the reviewer noted:

[t]he editor of *The Phoenix* [...] has imitated, with tolerable success, the style and manner of ancient romance. The story is enlivened with an agreeable variety of incidents; the narrative is plain and simple; and the whole is adapted to interest the feelings of the reader, provided he has either faith, or fancy, enough to be it interested in the appearance of ghosts⁷.

Reeve then sold the copyright to the London publisher Dilly which, in June 1778, published a second edition of the book, with the new title *The Old English Baron*. The same reviewer commented the revised version, observing that this time the author signed her full name, and finally referred to the author as 'her'. Walpole probably heard of Reeve's novel via the article about the author in *The Critical Review* for April 1778, a popular publication whose contributors included renowned writers, poets and philosophers, such as Tobias Smollett, Samuel Johnson and David Hume. Indeed, *The Critical Review* received Reeve's work positively, and celebrated *The Old English Baron* as an '[un]common novel; it may, in some respects, claim a place upon the same shelf with *The Castle of Otranto* [...]. The *Baron* will probably live as long as the

⁷ *Monthly Review*, 58 (January 1778), 85. Accessed on 1st September 2021.
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433082490685&view=1up&seq=103&q1=author>

*Castle*⁸. *The British Critic* too remarked that ‘[w]hen *The Old English Baron* made its appearance, every mouth was opened in its praise. [...] The younger branch of readers found their attention absolutely rivetted by the story, and at its conclusion, they have actually been seen to weep [...] because they had not another volume to peruse’⁹.

Despite the first favorable reviews, the opinions of critics were divided. As expected, Horace Walpole, in a letter to William Mason, dismissed Reeve’s novel as ‘[a]n imitation of *Otranto*, but reduced to reason and probability. [...] Any trial for murder at the Old Baily would make a more interesting story’¹⁰. Anna Laetitia Barbauld, in *The British Novelists*, noted that ‘[t]he chief fault of it is, that we foresee the conclusion before we have reached twenty pages, [...] and those who have read *The Old English Baron* at an early time of life are generally conscious at a much later period of the impression it once made upon their youthful fancy’¹¹.

Thus, if on the one hand some reviewers celebrated Reeve’s work as an uncommon novel that was appreciated especially by young readers, on the other, many critics judged *The Old English Baron* as a childish story with a predictable plot. However, despite the public was sharply divided, Reeve’s novel was a success and demonstrated how Gothic fiction could remain within the realm of the probable, given the recent inclination of this genre to adopt irrational supernatural incidents¹².

⁸ *The Critical Review*, 45 (April 1778), 316. Last accessed in September 2021.

https://books.google.je/books?id=DhQFAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_book_other_versions_r&cad=4#v=onepage&q&f=false

⁹ *British Critic: A new review for September, October, November, and December*, vol. II (1793), 383.

¹⁰ Walpole, *Correspondence*, XXVIII, 381.

¹¹ Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *The British Novelists*, vol. XXII (London, 1810), ii. Accessed on 1st September 2021. https://books.google.it/books?id=KQQyAQAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

¹² Botting, *Gothic*, 35-6.

3.2 Multiple Levels of Narration and the 'Disinheritance of Daughters'

Clery's analysis of *The Old English Baron* suggests three different levels on which Clara Reeve captivated the reader: as she argues, '[i]t is clear from Reeve's preface that she sought to engage readers on multiple levels, through the marvelous, the probable and the sentimental'¹³. She also added that their interaction could '[p]rovide a model or benchmark for further investigation of the strategies of much female Gothic writing'¹⁴, a feature which thus could help not only in the recognition of Reeve's genius, but also in the study of the interplay with other important female works of the eighteenth century, such as Sophia Lee's *The Recess*.

As Clery observes, the first level, the marvelous, relates to strong passions, and produces intense affect in the reader; it is associated with evil, fear and death. According to Burke's theory of the sublime, these passions draw the reader's attention to the highest degree. The second level, the probable, reduces and modernizes the marvelous: the rhetoric of realism, morally neutral, makes the supernatural attractive and pleasant for a sceptical audience. Thus, like a bridge between passion and sentiment, it connects the first level to the third one, the sentimental. Indeed, the sentimental level, reorientates the narrative towards social integration. The text engages the reader through the pathetic, arousing passions of pity, grief, and compassion. The images of terror and suffering make the sympathy interesting, whereas the narration redeems situations of pain and danger with moral sentiments. Therefore, Reeve's tripartite system creates a parallel drama in the heart and mind of the reader, which is resolved by the moral purpose of the novel.

This general pattern, as Clery notes, was central in female Gothic writings; however, probability, and the technique of filtering terror through sympathy, had become less prominent during the 1790s. Thus, as Gothic fiction reduced these features in order to include other elements related to the realm of the supernatural and the absurd, *The Old English Baron* illustrated how Gothic writers, especially female authors, dealt with the supernatural, probability and sympathy, in a system of narrative in which these factors

¹³ Clery, *Women's Gothic*, 31.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

were intertwined and dependent on one another.

Clery's analysis of *The Old English Baron's* narrative also focuses on the idea of displacement, a feature which Reeve's narration introduces from the beginning of the novel. In fact, the story opens with Sir Philip Harclay, a friend of Lord Lovel: Reeve, then, decided to begin her novel not with the introduction of the rightful heir Edmund, nor with the victims Arthur Lovel and her wife, nor even with the cousin and usurper Walter Lovel, but with a character that is not even part of the hero's family. Sir Philip Harclay is essential in Reeve's narrative, and the author's choice to present this valiant knight even before the narration, by choosing *The Champion of Virtue* as the title of the first edition, is a significant decision which presents Harclay as a crucial character.

Sir Philip, who is returning to England after having fought for years against the Saracens in Greece, is introduced not only as a valorous knight but also as an enterprising person who can manage financial difficulties well. Indeed, once in Yorkshire, he '[f]ound his mother and sister were dead, and his estate sequestered in the hands of Commissioners appointed by the Protector'¹⁵. Almost two full pages are dedicated to the arrangement of his financial affairs, which establish the realism of the tale. After this first unfortunate situation, a second one occurs: Sir Philip's journey to visit his old friend Arthur Lovel ends with the discovery of his departure.

Therefore, Reeve engages the sentiments of the reader with two episodes of attachment and loss¹⁶; together with the description of financial contingencies, Reeve's tripartite system of narration is thus presented from the beginning of the story, allowing the reader to accept the following supernatural episodes after an introduction which involves both compassion and realism. In fact, Sir Philip's loss of his mother, sister, and friend, contribute to orientate the narrative towards the sentimental level, whereas the arrangement of financial affairs helps to establish a connection with realism and probability. Thus, these two levels introduce and limit at the same time the 'level of the marvelous', through which Reeve captivated the reader without, however, leading to an improper use of supernatural machinery.

¹⁵ Reeve, *English Baron*, 6.

¹⁶ Clery, *Women's Gothic*, 33.

The use of dreams as omens are indeed sporadic and adopted to attract the reader's attention, according to the 'level of the marvelous'. Sir Philip Harclay, after the loss of his friend, sees Arthur Lovel in his dreams and tries in vain to embrace him; after he vanished in a '[d]ark and frightful cave'¹⁷, Harclay finds Lovel's armor stained with blood, a clear hint at Arthur's murder. Furthermore, Edmund's dream about his real parents also suggests a supernatural presence, which enables the resolution of the drama. On the first night spent in the haunted wing of the castle, the hero dreams about a warrior and a lady, who stand by his bed. The scene already provides the reader with clues about Edmund's true identity as the heir of Lovel castle and alludes to the future restoration of justice, if the hero is able to avenge the murder of his parents.

Reeve's tripartite system of narration, which mediates between morality and supernatural machinery, is developed not only through the figure of the main hero, but also through secondary characters such as Sir Philip Harclay, who is fundamental both at the beginning and at the end of the novel. Reeve's work presents Harclay as '*The Champion of Virtue*', who enables the development of the story through the discovery of the death of Lord Lovel. Likewise way, the valiant knight challenges Walter Lovel to trial by combat, facilitating the conclusion of the novel with Walter's confession of the murder of Edmund's parents.

If the title of the first edition of the novel emphasizes a character that does not belong to the hero's real family, the second edition too serves the same purpose, focusing, however, on a different character. In fact, '*The Old English Baron*' has been identified by critics¹⁸ as Baron Fitz-Owen, the benevolent benefactor who raised Edmund as if he was one of his sons. Throughout the novel, the Baron always believed in Edmund's honesty and morality; moreover, after the revelation of Edmund's true identity, Baron Fitz-Owen blessed his union with his daughter Emma:

[E]dmund bowed low, he advanced towards her; the Baron took his daughter's hand, and presented it to him; he kneeled upon one knee, he took her hand, kissed it, and pressed it to his bosom. The Baron

¹⁷ Reeve, *English Baron*, 11.

¹⁸ James Watt, *Introduction*, in Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron*, XV-XX.

embraced and blessed them; he presented them to Sir Philip Harclay—"Receive and acknowledge your children!" said he. "I do receive them as the gift of Heaven!" said the noble knight; "they are as much mine as if I had begotten them: all that I have is theirs, and shall descend to their children for ever." A fresh scene of congratulation ensued; and the hearts of all the auditors were too much engaged to be able soon to return to the ease and tranquillity of common life¹⁹.

Although James Watt argues that *The Champion of Virtue* and *The Old English Baron* could both refer to Sir Philip Harclay or Baron Fitz-Owen, the previous passage underlines how these two characters are '[p]resented as benevolent paternalists who recognize the duties and obligations incumbent upon their privilege'²⁰. Moreover, the titles of the two editions underline both '[t]he importance of the virtue that Baron Fitz-Owen and Sir Philip Harclay champion, which helps to secure the general recognition of Edmund's rightful place' and 'the status of one of the champions ahead of the merit of his protégé'²¹.

Therefore, as Clery argues, the titles to both first and second editions represent a displacement, since '[t]hey refer to characters not immediately involved in the family drama'²². In fact, both '*The Champion of Virtue*' and '*The Old English Baron*' are titles which emphasize characters that later turn out to be not the protagonists of the story, nor relatives of the actual one. However, Sir Philip and the Baron's will to protect and support Edmund emerge with a paternal attitude, which helps him to discover his true identity and later to establish himself in Lovel Castle as its rightful heir. Moreover, even if Sir Philip Harclay and Baron Fitz-Owen are not part of the hero's real family, the narration describes these two characters as if they were Edmund's fathers: at the beginning of the novel, Emma and Edmund are announced as 'the sons of the Baron', whereas at the end of Reeve's narration they are acknowledged as 'Sir Philip's children', highlighting the fundamental role played by both Harclay and the Baron in shaping Edmund's destiny.

¹⁹ Reeve, *English Baron*, 127.

²⁰ Watt, *Introduction*, XX.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² Clery, *Women's Gothic*, 33.

Clery's analysis of the displacement also mentions the figure of Sir Walter Lovel, the villain of the story who, as she observes, is displaced both narratively and geographically. At the begin of the story, Sir Walter Lovel is introduced as a relative of Lord Lovel, who '[s]old the Castle to [Baron Fitz-Owen], and went away, and built himself a house in the north country, as far as Northumberland'²³. At the end of the novel, after a brief duel against Sir Philip Harclay, his confession is followed by his departure for Constantinople. Thus, this character is once again geographically dislocated: this time Walter Lovel finds refuge not at the borders of England, but under the reign of the penultimate Byzantine emperor, John Palaeologus.

However, his presence is not crucial to the development of the story, and he is revealed as the murderer of Edmund's parents only before the denouement. Reeve's villain, throughout the novel, always remains a mysterious figure which emphasizes not only his dark and enigmatic personality, but also Reeve's will to keep distance from a character that could weaken the moral purpose of her novel.

The displacement in Reeve's work is therefore developed through different characters and various features in the narration; however, its intent always remains that of highlighting the sentiments, the realism, and the morality of the novel. Indeed, as Clery argues, these 'distancing devices should not be considered the result of constraints on the author, but rather as evidence of her belief in the immense affective power of the passions underlying her story'²⁴. Clery's analysis of secondary characters underline Reeve's careful development of male heroes and villains; however, Reeve's narration focuses mainly on the protagonist Edmund Twyford who, as Vivien Jones observes, is the only character in *The Old English Baron* that possesses the '[s]ensibility of a woman'²⁵. Whereas female characters have no functional role in the novel, the protagonist occupies a feminized position, transposing the situation and form of the typical male character to a female-centered sentimental novel. In fact, *The Old English Baron* could represent the point of view of its female author regarding the situation of women during the eighteenth century. During this period, literature provided stories of

²³ Reeve, *English Baron*, 8.

²⁴ Clery, *Women's Gothic*, 33.

²⁵ Vivien Jones, *Women and Literature in Britain: 1700-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 115.

women victimized by the machinations of stepmothers, tales of daughters long separated from their families and miraculously reunited with their parents, and the claim of their rightful names and fortunes because of a document long hidden or the testimony of loyal servants²⁶. Reeve's male protagonist proves his legitimacy and claims his rightful place in the family lineage; together with Edmund's marked sensibility, Jones suggests that these features contributed to the creation of a female disinherited protagonist²⁷.

The main character turns pale and weeps several times throughout the novel, showing his emotions not only through his thoughts and feelings, but also with his body. Moreover, his tears and language are crucial features of the protagonist's characterization, since they trigger the reaction of the other characters. Indeed, during his speech to Sir Philip and Baron Fitz-Owen, after Harclay's proposal to become part of his family at the beginning of the novel, '[t]he tears made themselves channels down Edmund's cheeks; and his two noble auditors, catching the tender infection, wiped their eyes at the conclusion'²⁸. His sensibility is contagious and, as Sir Philip's words suggest, Edmund's qualities are so precious and unique that he needs to be protected:

[E]dmund bowed low, and withdrew, with his eyes full of tears of sensibility and gratitude. When he was gone, Sir Philip said, 'I am thinking, that though young Edmund wants not my assistance at present, he may hereafter stand in need of my friendship. I should not wonder if such rare qualities as he possesses, should one day create envy, and raise him enemies; in which case he might come to lose your favour, without any fault of yours or his own'²⁹.

Edmund never hides his feelings: after being accused of having dishonored the family of his benefactor, William embraced him '[w]hile tears of cordial affection bedewed their cheeks'³⁰; before defending himself against the accuses, Edmund '[t]hrew himself

²⁶ Jones, *Literature in Britain*, 113.

²⁷ Jones, *Literature in Britain*, 115.

²⁸ Reeve, *English Baron*, 16.

²⁹ Reeve, *English Baron*, 17.

³⁰ Reeve, *English Baron*, 32.

at the Baron's feet, and wet his hand with his tears'³¹. Still, after the discovery of the Lovel's necklace which could prove his lineage, '[E]dmund's passions, long suppressed, broke out in tears and exclamations; he kneeled down, and, with his hands clasped together, returned thanks to Heaven for the discovery'³².

Though trained in knightly skills, Edmund seems to take life without fighting: he always relies on his patience and faith, believing that Heaven will help him to overcome adversity. These features belong to rather female characters in Gothic conventions, which often represent them as patient and weak figures³³ which need the aid of strong and fearless male heroes. Moreover, Edmund's passivity is displayed through his inability to '[u]tter a word' after Baron Fitz-Owen recognizes him as the true heir of Lovel Castle. He even faints into the arms of Harclay, '[d]eprived of strength and almost of life'³⁴. As the protagonist's behavior suggests, Edmund above all desires the Baron's emotional and legal acceptance³⁵, which underlines his sensibility and his will to be acknowledge by Fitz-Owen family as legitimate, not to triumph over them.

Therefore, as Jones observes, Edmund embodies a female sensibility that is expressed through his tears, language, and behavior, and enacts '[t]he longed-for restitution of the disinherited daughter reclaiming her rightful place in the family'³⁶.

Edmund's analysis from Jones' perspective suggests an in-depth study of the economic situation of women during the eighteenth century. At that time, daughters were not expected to share equally in the wealth of their birth families, and marriage choice and inheritance were thus displayed by novels as two intertwined elements, dependent one another. Moreover, the '[b]iologically given family into which one was born was gradually becoming secondary to the chosen family constructed by marriage'³⁷, therefore women had to think carefully about the dilemma between duty and desire when a family exigency occurred. The role of women, even in literature, was to cement the entitlements of the male line of inheritance, a position that was often threatened by collateral male relatives, who were placed in the line before women in

³¹ Reeve, *English Baron*, 40.

³² Reeve, *English Baron*, 53.

³³ Anna Powell and Andrew Smith, *Teaching the Gothic* (New York: Palgrave USA, 2006), 111-3.

³⁴ Reeve, *English Baron*, 121.

³⁵ Jones, *Literature in Britain*, 116.

³⁶ Jones, *Literature in Britain*, 117.

³⁷ Jones, *Literature in Britain*, 111.

order to keep properties attached to the family name. Thus, daughters were deployed to ratify alliances by marriage, since it could affect every member of the birth family.

The Old English Baron ends with the endogamous marriage that integrates Edmund in the Fitz-Owen family, celebrated by the Baron as '[t]he band of love that unites all my children to me, and to each other'³⁸. The cross-cousin marriage thus naturalizes in biology what had been socially constructed³⁹, dissolving the created and the biological family into one another. Moreover, the legalistic recording of Edmund's lineage needs visible pieces of evidence: testimony of servants, bloody armor and tokens are evidence employed during the scrutiny. The commissioners observed that '[t]he proofs were indisputable'⁴⁰ and Edmund's legitimacy was legally established.

Therefore, only marriage and written evidence can legitimate the figure of the disinherited hero embodied by Edmund. The claim of his rightful place in the family lineage, his sensibility which resembles that of a woman, his patience, and his supplicant gestures, suggest a representation of the author's perception of the situation of women during the eighteenth century. As Jones observes, *The Old English Baron*, '[w]ritten by a conservative woman [...] who knew that gender prejudice hindered the reward of merit in women, [...] dramatizes the wish-fulfilment fantasy of the wrongfully disinherited child who rises to take his (her) rightful place, while it reinscribes the natural entitlement of class'⁴¹.

³⁸ Reeve, *English Baron*, 129.

³⁹ Jones, *Literature in Britain*, 118.

⁴⁰ Reeve, *English Baron*, 114.

⁴¹ Jones, *Literature in Britain*, 118. Jones' use of the pronoun 'her', employed several times by the author in her analysis of Edmund, stresses her vision of the protagonist as a female character.

3.3 Historical Elements

If the analysis of *The Old English Baron*'s characters displays the modern eighteenth-century sensibility, which also suggests the rise of new social values embodied by the nascent middle classes⁴², much can also be said about the historical elements contained in Reeve's novel, which link the past to the present. The important connection between history and romance in the literary world, which has already been pointed out in the previous chapters, is indeed represented in Reeve's narrative through several elements, such as language, costumes, religion, and attention to historical facts, with different results.

Regarding the language and style employed by Reeve, critics have observed that her narrative is '[s]imple and plain; the diction is neither archaic nor modern, although it is stately and homely by turns according to the characters' station'⁴³. Reeve's varying diction thus connects past and present by presenting a medieval setting with characters that '[a]ct much in the fashion of the seventeenth century'⁴⁴. As Scott argued, '[b]aron Fitz-Owen, and the principal characters, talk after the fashion of country squires of that period, and the lower personages like gaffers and gammers of the same era'⁴⁵.

The different style of Margery Twyford, the peasant woman who adopted Edmund, and the protagonist, in describing the adoption of Lovel's true heir, highlights Reeve's ability in her diction. The following passage illustrates how Margery describes Edmund's infancy:

[j]ust one-and-twenty years ago [...] I lost my first-born son: I got a hurt by overreaching myself, when I was near my time, and so the poor child died. And so, as I was sitting all alone, and very melancholy, Andrew came home from work: see, Margery, said he, I brought you a child instead of that you have lost [...] The poor infant was cold, and it cried, and looked up at me so pitifully, that I loved it; besides, my milk was troublesome to me, and I was glad to be eased

⁴² Watt, *Introduction*, XVI.

⁴³ Lorene Catherine Elder, *Clara Reeve's Gothic background* (Master's Thesis, Rice University, 1950), 46. <https://hdl.handle.net/1911/89400>.

⁴⁴ Scott, *Lives*, 203.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

of it.⁴⁶

This homely relation is represented differently by Edmund, who employs a high-sounding description of his adoption when presenting his foster parents⁴⁷: '[t]hese are the good people to whom I am, under God, indebted for my present happiness; they were my first benefactors; I was obliged to them for food and sustenance in my childhood, and this good wo loan nourished my infancy at her own breast'⁴⁸. However, as Lorene Elder observes, Walpole's diversified speech between a peasant and a nobleman in *The Castle of Otranto* could probably be responsible for Reeve's technique, and therefore justify the different styles adopted in Reeve's narration.

Furthermore, Reeve's language could represent a deliberate effort to avoid both archaic and modern style⁴⁹. In her work *The Phoenix*, Reeve informed the reader that her translation of Barclay's *Argenis* '[h]as endeavoured to reform the language, without destroying the simplicity of the style, and has aimed at a language suitable to the subject, believing that a medium between the former antiquated one, and the present fashionable one, would best answer that purpose'⁵⁰.

Reeve argued that '[o]ur language has not gained any advantages by the innovations that have been made in it within the last twenty years; it has lost more in strength and conciseness, than it has gained in sweetness and elegance'⁵¹. This could explain why, after having consulted Robert Le Gruys' translation of *Argenis*⁵², although she admired his style for its simplicity, she replaced the obsolete diction of this early translation with a language more suitable for modern readers.

Thus, Reeve may have adapted an analogous style in her most famous novel, updating the archaic Elizabethan diction employed by Walpole in *The Castle of Otranto* and providing readers a more suitable language without, however, adopting the modern language of contemporary novels.

⁴⁶ Reeve, *English Baron*, 50.

⁴⁷ Elder, *Reeve's Gothic background*, 47.

⁴⁸ Reeve, *English Baron*, 127.

⁴⁹ Elder, *Reeve's Gothic background*, 48.

⁵⁰ Clara Reeve, *The Phoenix* (London, 1772), I.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵² John Barclay's *Argenis* was originally published in Latin in 1621. Ben Jonson was the first one to translate Barclay's work into English, but his version was lost in a fire. The most recent translation available for Reeve was therefore that of Robert Le Gruys (1628).

Language is not the only element on which Reeve focused her narration: on the contrary, also historical details lend credence to the events of the story.

The novel opens with Sir Philip Harclay's return to England, under the reign of Henry VI; during this period, John Duke of Bedford was Regent of France. Then Harclay meets Edmund, a sixteen-year-old boy; after a four-year interval in the story, the reader finds the protagonist in France, serving under the Duke of York, when England was fighting the French army of Charles VII in the Hundred Years War. Since the Duke of Bedford died in 1435 and the Duke of York went to France the following year to take his place, Edmund may have served under the Duke of York between 1436 and 1437. Therefore, as critics have argued, the opening of the novel may be dated approximately between 1432 and 1433⁵³.

Edmund's birth should thus have occurred in 1416-17; however, Reeve writes that Arthur Lovel left his pregnant wife to fight under Henry IV in Wales. The king died in 1413, so there is a contradiction in Edmund's age: a minor fault since Reeve '[a]voided giving definite dates for historical events [and did not] expect her readers to sit down and carefully date the events'⁵⁴. Moreover, another historical person is mentioned in the text: at the end of the novel, after he reveals Edmund's true identity, Walter Lovel spends the rest of his life serving under John Palaeologus, who lived from 1390 to 1448. The main events of the story take place around 1436-37, thus Reeve supposes that Walter Lovel lived for another ten years, since Zadinsky foresaw the downfall of Constantinople and the Greek empire before the end of the novel.

Clara Reeve's narration, despite some minor mistakes, handles events with historical fidelity, contributing to the creation of a believable setting which adds realism to an exciting but improbable plot. On the contrary, Horace Walpole avoided any reference to specific events: as the preface of the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto* suggests, the story could take place sometime between 1095 and 1243.

Even if both these authors never provided definite dates for historical events, it is clear that Reeve's will to limit both the supernatural machinery and the archaic Elizabethan diction of *The Castle of Otranto* also influenced the realism of her story,

⁵³ Elder, *Reeve's Gothic background*, 51.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

allowing the author of *The Old English Baron* to represent a more precise and believable medieval setting with particular attention to historical details, and with a language suitable for modern readers.

Reeve's effort to reproduce a plausible medieval background is displayed also through an accurate description of the chivalric code of conduct. Indeed, the trial by combat which involves Sir Philip Harclay and Lord Lovel is described in detail with particular attention to the procedures of the trial; moreover, it displays the chivalric virtues of Middle Ages. Harclay is eager to prove Lord Lovel's guilty and, since he knows Lovel would never accept Edmund's challenge because of his peasant background, he decides to challenge Walter himself.

Without demanding a public trial or complaining to the king, Harclay is determined to defeat Lord Lovel, who accepts Sir Philip's challenge to defend his honor. The combat begins and is described as follows:

[t]he first that entered the field was Sir Phillip Harclay, knight, armed completely, excepting his headpiece; Hugh Rugby, his esquire, bearing his lance; John Barnard, his page, carrying his helmet and spurs; and two servants in his proper livery [...] At a short distance came the Lord Clifford, as judge of the field, with his esquire; two pages, and two livery servants [...] he also brought a surgeon of note to take care of the wounded. The Lord Graham saluted them; and by his order they took their places without the lists, and the trumpet sounded for the challenger. It was answered by the defendent, who soon after appeared, attended by three gentlemen his friends, with each one servant, besides his own proper attendants. A place was erected for the Lord Clifford, as judge of the field; he desired Lord Graham would share the office, who accepted it, on condition that the combatants should make no objection; and they agreed to it with the greatest courtesy and respect. [...] They appointed a marshal of the field, and other inferior officers, usually employed on these occasions. The Lord Graham sent the marshal for the challenger, desiring him to

declare the cause of his quarrel before his enemy⁵⁵.

Reeve's interest in the medieval trial by combat is clearly demonstrated in this passage, whose description is influenced by medieval romances from which Reeve probably got the inspiration to represent the combat⁵⁶.

The battle is then won by Sir Philip who, after numerous accusations and denials during the challenging fight, injures his opponent, who surrenders and confesses his crimes:

[t]hey contended a long time with equal skill and courage; at length Sir Philip unhorsed his antagonist. [...] Sir Philip took away his sword, and then waved it over his head, and beckoned for assistance. The judges sent to beg Sir Philip to spare the life of his enemy. 'I will', said he, 'upon condition that he will make an honest confession'⁵⁷.

These historical based descriptions of medieval customs want to promote chivalric virtues such as honor and honesty, and at the same time show Reeve's interest in reproducing a plausible medieval background with historical fidelity. Other chivalric virtues such as courage, hospitality, generosity, and chastity, are illustrated in the novel.

These virtues were described by Richard Hurd in his *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762) as the '[e]ssential qualities of a knight'⁵⁸. Not only did Hurd's work defend Gothic culture as already stated in the previous chapters, but it also influenced writers such as Reeve who, as *The Old English Baron* seems to indicate⁵⁹, wrote her novel and her chivalric characters while keeping in mind Hurd's work.

Courage, the first quality mentioned by Hurd, is embodied by both Sir Philip Harclay and Edmund Twyford. As the words of Clara Reeve attest, Harclay served his king with loyalty, exhibiting his courage in numerous battles: '[h]e had served under the glorious King Henry the Fifth with distinguished valour, had acquired an honourable fame, and

⁵⁵ Reeve, *English Baron*, 85-6.

⁵⁶ Elder, *Reeve's Gothic background*, 59.

⁵⁷ Reeve, *English Baron*, 87.

⁵⁸ Hurd, *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, 92.

⁵⁹ Elder, *Reeve's Gothic background*, 60.

was no less esteemed for Christian virtues than for deeds of chivalry. [...] He entered into the service of the Greek emperor, and distinguished his courage against the encroachments of the Saracens'⁶⁰. Harclay's chivalric virtues are also displayed during his combat against Lord Lovel: without the help of other characters, he challenges Lovel in order to obtain a confession from him. At the same time, he wants to protect Edmund from a dangerous fight. His bravery is thus related to his will to know the truth and restore Edmund's title and holdings; therefore, both courage and generosity are embodied by Sir Philip.

Edmund exhibits his courage during his service in France. The young Twyford leads his army to victory, and his achievements in battle are acknowledged by the Regent himself:

[t]he young nobles all followed [Edmund]; they broke through the detachment, and stopped the waggons. The officer who commanded the party, encouraged them to go on; the defeat was soon complete, and the provisions carried in triumph to the English camp. Edmund was presented to the Regent as the man to whom the victory was chiefly owing. [...] 'Approach, young man' said the Regent, 'that I may confer upon you the honour of knighthood, which you have well deserved'⁶¹.

Richard Wenlock, cousin of William Fitz-Owen, protests against the Regent's decision to knight Edmund, recalling his humble social background; however, Edmund does not oppose to his objection. On the contrary he, '[w]ith a modest bow' replies: '[i]t is true indeed I am a peasant, and this honour is too great for me; I have only done my duty'⁶². Edmund's humility proves that his courage in battle is driven by his will to '[d]o his duty' without expecting any reward, a quality which, as previously stated, is present in Sir Philip Harclay too.

Moreover, Edmund demonstrates his chivalric virtues during his stay in the west side of Lovel Castle. Lord Fitz-Owen asks him to sleep three nights in the haunted wing, yet supernatural presences do not stop the young peasant from investigating into Lord Lovel's murder. In the night, the protagonist hears a '[d]ismal hollow groan, [...]' as if

⁶⁰ Reeve, *English Baron*, 5.

⁶¹ Reeve, *English Baron*, 27.

⁶² Reeve, *English Baron*, 28.

from underneath'⁶³ and '[m]arks of fear' are visible upon Edmund's face. Nevertheless, the young hero is determined to uncover the mystery behind the death of Arthur Lovel. As Oswald states, Edmund is '[d]esigned by Heaven to be its instrument in bringing this deed of darkness to light'⁶⁴. Edmund then becomes accustomed to the noises heard in the haunted wing, and his initial trepidation is replaced by his intention to find out and then reveal the truth behind his father's murder. Once again, Edmund's bravery is guided by his sense of justice and duty.

All those episodes highlight the hero's bravery, which is demonstrated not only in mortal battles but also by his facing supernatural dangers. Edmund, as well as his benefactor, is a character that stands against injustice, exhibiting courage in several situations that underline his chivalric virtues.

Hospitality, another essential quality of a knight according to Hurd⁶⁵, is offered to all travelers throughout the story. Baron Fitz-Owen, although he does not know Sir Philip, welcomes him as a friend, since he is an old acquaintance of Arthur Lovel: '[t]ell the noble stranger that the Baron Fitz-Owen greets him well, and desires him to rest assured, that though Lord Lovel is dead, and the castle fallen into other hands, his friends will always find a welcome there; and my lord desires that he will accept of a lodging there, while he remains in this country'⁶⁶.

Lord Clifford, who arranges the trial by combat between Sir Philip Harclay and Walter Lovel, receives Edmund and Zadisky with '[k]indness and hospitality', and together they '[s]pent the evening in the pleasures of convivial mirth and hospitable entertainment'⁶⁷. Also Lord Graham, after Harclay's victory in the trial by combat, welcomes more than thirty people to his castle in order to resolve the quarrel regarding Edmund's inheritance; once in Lord Graham's castle, '[t]hey were received with the utmost respect and kindness by the noble master'⁶⁸.

Hospitality is thus offered to different characters in *The Old English Baron* and is extended not only to friends and restricted groups, but also to strangers and a large

⁶³ Reeve, *English Baron*, 47.

⁶⁴ Reeve, *English Baron*, 48.

⁶⁵ Hurd, *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, 92.

⁶⁶ Reeve, *English Baron*, 15.

⁶⁷ Reeve, *English Baron*, 80.

⁶⁸ Reeve, *English Baron*, 99.

number of people.

Generosity is another chivalric virtue that in the novel is offered to every person, without distinction between rich and poor, friends and strangers, nobles and servants.

Sir Philip Harclay, as previously stated, is the character that best embodies this virtue in the novel: he performs acts of benevolence, especially towards Edmund, guided by his sense of justice. However, his generosity is not offered exclusively to the son of his old and noble friend Arthur; in fact, Harclay's chivalric virtue is displayed also in his relations with poor people and maimed strangers. When he returned from France and went back home, Sir Philip '[l]ooked round his neighborhood for objects of his charity; when lie saw merit in distress, it was his delight to raise and support it; he spent his time in the service of his Creator, and glorified him in doing good to his creatures'⁶⁹. Moreover, when the Baron asks him what he will do with his '[o]ld soldiers and dependants', he replies:

[m]y lord, I will never cast them off. There is another house on my estate that has been shut up many years; I will have it repaired and furnished properly for the reception of my old men: I will endow it with a certain sum to be paid annually, and will appoint a steward to manage their revenue; I will continue it during the lives of the first inhabitants, and after that I shall leave it to my son here, to do as he pleases⁷⁰.

Disable veterans, old servants, and poor people are helped by Harclay, who employs his wealth to relieve people from their financial distresses. His chivalric virtues are driven only by his will to give assistance to disadvantaged people, which makes him a central figure in the moral purpose of Reeve's novel.

The chivalric behavior of Edmund illustrates the last important quality of medieval times mentioned before, which is also related to his generous and respectful attitude:

⁶⁹ Reeve, *English Baron*, 22.

⁷⁰ Reeve, *English Baron*, 126.

chastity. In traditional chivalric romances, knights were loyal to one lady⁷¹ and proved their love by showing their skills and courage in dangerous and mortal battles. In the novel, Edmund demonstrates to be a valorous knight during war, but this is not the only reason why he is, for Baron Fitz-Owen, the perfect match for Emma: Edmund is indeed a respectful and courteous man, who always expresses his love for Emma through acts of courtesy, which highlight his chivalric virtues.

Edmund's chivalric gallantry is displayed during his conversation with Emma, before he leaves Fitz-Owen Castle. The young peasant believes that he does not deserve her love because of his low rank, and since he is not a noble like Emma, he dares not reveal his affection directly. However, he confesses that a friend of him is in love with her, and that he would do anything to prove his affection to her:

[E]dmund went on. 'My most ardent wishes are, that the fair Emma may reserve her heart and hand till a certain person, a friend of mine, is at liberty to solicit them; whose utmost ambition is, first to deserve, and then to obtain them'. [...] 'It is utterly impossible' said he, 'for any man of inferior degree to aspire to Lady Emma's favour; her noble birth, the dignity of her beauty and virtues, must awe and keep at their proper distance, all men of inferior degree and merit; they may admire, they may revere; but they must not presume to approach too near, lest their presumption should meet with its punishment'⁷².

Another passage also underlines Edmund's will to receive Baron Fitz-Owen's permission before asking her hand. This scene highlights not only Edmund's respect of chivalric traditions, but also his wish to be part of Emma's family with the approval of the family itself: '[Emma replied] "Tell him, that the man that hopes for my favour must apply to my lord for his." "That is my friend's intention—his resolution, I should say—as soon as he can do it with propriety; and I accept your permission for him to do so"⁷³.

Moreover, Edmund's gallantry is represented in the final part of the novel, after he is acknowledged as the true heir of Lord Lovel. Now that his noble origins have been acknowledged, he can reveal his love for Emma: the two lovers are finally together, and

⁷¹ Elder, *Reeve's Gothic background*, 61.

⁷² Reeve, *English Baron*, 59.

⁷³ Reeve, *English Baron*, 60.

behave '[w]ith solemn respect to each other, but with apparent reserve'⁷⁴. The only concrete expression of Edmund's love is represented by his decision to kiss Emma's hand; however, this sign of respect and affection is not followed by any sensual or erotic scene, thus their chastity is maintained until their marriage.

Edmund's chivalric virtues are thus displayed several times during the novel, and with different purposes. However, by quoting Reeve's *Progress of Romance*, one could argue that the most important moral value that Edmund embodies is that of '[t]reat[ing] the object of [his] passion with the utmost respect [and to be] the protector of the weaker sex'⁷⁵.

⁷⁴ Reeve, *English Baron*, 115.

⁷⁵ Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance* (Colchester, 1785), 68.

3.4 Religion and the Supernatural

If Chivalric virtues lend credence to the events of the story, religious elements are employed in the novel with the same purpose.

Many references to the religion of fifteenth-century England are included in *The Old English Baron*. For example, while Edmund and his companions were investigating the haunted wing of Lovel castle, Father Oswald ‘[r]epeated the paternoster, in which they all joined’; before finding Arthur’s armor, ‘[O]swald followed with his rosary in his hand, and Joseph last with trembling steps. The door opened with ease, and they descended the stairs in profound silence’⁷⁶. Later,

[O]swald made signs for them to kneel, and he prayed audibly, that Heaven would direct them how to act; he also prayed for the soul of the departed, that it might rest in peace. After this, he arose; but Edmund continued kneeling—he vowed solemnly to devote himself to the discovery of this secret, and the avenging the death of the person there buried. [...] Edmund [and] Oswald crossed [themselves] and prayed for the departed soul.

Even if religious elements are found especially in Edmund’s inspection of the west side of the castle and employed to contrast the supernatural forces that the characters could have faced in the central part of the novel, Reeve’s use of Catholic tradition can be located also in the first and last section of *The Old English Baron*. In fact, before coming back home after thirty years away from England, Sir Philip Harclay ‘[s]topped at the place where his faithful servant was buried, and caused masses to be said for the repose of his soul; then, pursuing his way by easy journeys, arrived in safety at home’⁷⁷.

Furthermore, Lord Lovel confesses his crimes to a priest in order to obtain forgiveness for his sins, and the priest’s words suggest that Lord Lovel can be redeemed: “[p]raise be to God!” said the good priest; “he hath touched your heart with true contrition, and you shew the effect of his mercies; you will do justice, and you will be rewarded by the gift of repentance unto salvation”⁷⁸.

⁷⁶ Reeve, *English Baron*, 45.

⁷⁷ Reeve, *English Baron*, 22.

⁷⁸ Reeve, *English Baron*, 91.

Religious elements like the sign of the cross, the rosary, the paternoster, and liturgical ceremonies are displayed throughout the novel both to defend the characters from supernatural presences and to honor the dead. Reeve's adoption of the Catholic tradition thus stresses the historical fidelity of *The Old English Baron*: together with the meticulous description of chivalric virtues, represented by different characters, Reeve's Gothic story '[a]ttempts to mirror Gothic customs and religion'⁷⁹; as Elder writes, '[o]pinions may differ as to its success or failure, but Miss Reeve should be credited with a conscious effort to reproduce what she considered the chivalric and medieval background'⁸⁰.

Religion and supernatural are two intertwined features of *The Old English Baron*. James Watt studies how Reeve revised Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*: his analysis of her characters demonstrates the author's will to keep distance from Walpole's supernatural by presenting heroes who override their fears with the help of the Christian faith, whereas villains are overwhelmed by supernatural presences which reflect their own guilt.

Reeve's revision of Walpole's characters can be traced in Markham and Wenlock, two villains who help Robert Fitz-Owen scheming against Edmund: during their brief appearances in the novel, they provide comic interludes, as did the domestics Jaquez and Diego, in Walpole's novel. Moreover, Manfred's two servants, who are shocked to find a giant leg and foot in armor in the gallery, are replaced in Reeve's novel by the two cousins of the Fitz-Owen family who, during their stay in the west side of Lovel castle, encounter a ghost.

All these characters share the same features, which shows Reeve's inspiration from *The Castle of Otranto*: if Jaquez and Diego offer a comic departure from Walpole's Gothic story with their exaggerated reactions after seeing the giant armor, in *The Old English Baron* Markham and Wenlock's characters, with their trembling reaction after the ghost's apparition, are designed to share the same purpose,. Manfred's servants report their supernatural encounter to their master; similarly, the two cousins in Reeve's novel confess to the whole family to have seen a ghost in the haunted wing of the castle.

⁷⁹ Elder, *Reeve's Gothic background*, 64.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

However, Reeve's revision of Walpole's work adds guilt to these characters, an innovative feature which is once again related to the moral purpose of the novel. Indeed, when the ghost appears, Markham and Wenlock '[s]tood like statues petrified by fear, yet listening with trembling expectation'; they were so scared that '[t]hey staggered to a seat, and sunk down upon it, ready to faint'⁸¹. Not only does their dramatic response to a dangerous threat offer a comic interlude according to Watt, but it also '[r]eflect[s] their guilt at being involved in the plot against Edmund'⁸².

Walter Lovel shows a guilty conscience already in the first pages of the novel. After the murder of Arthur and the acquisition of his castle, Walter obtained his revenge. However, later in the novel, the reader discovers that '[t]he new Lord could not sleep in quiet in his own room; and this induced him to sell the castle to his brother-in-law, and get out of this country as fast as possible'⁸³. Walter's decision to leave and then sell the castle, and the sleepless nights spent in the house of the cousin he murdered are evidence of his guilt and a manifestation of remorse, a sign that there are no pure villains in *The Old English Baron*.

Reeve's moral purpose is thus displayed by her supernatural machinery which, on the one hand, reflects the guilt of villains and, on the other, makes Christian characters even more courageous and heroic. As Watt argues, '[c]haracters such as Edmund, along with Father Oswald and the family servant Joseph, [...] respond to the mysteries of the apartment in a calmer and more deliberate manner'⁸⁴. Even if Edmund's lamp is blown out by the wind during his investigation, leaving him in '[u]tter darkness' while hearing '[h]ollow rustling noise like that of a person coming through a narrow passage'⁸⁵, his Christian faith overrides his fears. Indeed, the son of Arthur Lovel regains his confidence: '[w]hat should I fear? I have not willfully offended God, or man; why, then, should I doubt protection?'⁸⁶.

The following nights, Edmund and his companions are accustomed to the noises of the haunted wing of Lovel castle: using Reeve's words, '[b]eing somewhat familiarized

⁸¹ Reeve, *English Baron*, 69.

⁸² Watt, *Introduction*, XI.

⁸³ Reeve, *English Baron*, 44.

⁸⁴ Watt, *Introduction*, XI.

⁸⁵ Reeve, *English Baron*, 37.

⁸⁶ Reeve, *English Baron*, 37.

to it, they were not so strongly affected'⁸⁷.

The discovery of the portraits of Arthur Lovel and his wife, along with the bloodstained armor, give Edmund and his companions the hints of the tragic death of the peasant's parents. The evocation of the supernatural is thus resolved with clues that will help the protagonist claim his rightful place in the castle. Moreover, the '[h]ollow rustling noise' heard by Edmund is followed by the apparition of the servant Joseph, not that of a ghost, a sign that supernatural presences dwell only in evil characters.

Therefore, the Christian heroes of the story never encounter true supernatural forces since their religious devotion is strong and sincere, allowing them not to fall prey to superstition. On the contrary, villains such as Markham and Wenlock run into a ghost, a presence that is used by Reeve as a tool to reflect the remorse and guilt of wicked characters.

Supernatural occurrences are thus sporadic in *The Old English Baron* and related to the moral purpose of the novel. Clery's analysis stresses the realist aspect of Reeve's work, whose evocation of the supernatural is so limited that, as soon as a ghost is mentioned, '[w]ithout fanfare the supernatural [slips] back into the realm of truth'⁸⁸.

The narrative mystery offered by Edmund's vision of the ghosts of his parents, the sound of footsteps, and the description of dark rooms in the west wing of Lovel castle, do not tolerate more intense supernatural scenes. These are indeed the only paranormal elements in *The Old English Baron* and, as Clery notes, '[b]y the midpoint of the book all supernatural occurrences are finished'⁸⁹, in order to focus the narration on the redistribution of land and inheritance.

However, in the preface of her novel, Clara Reeve expresses her theories about the supernatural and her intentions and methods regarding the use of supernatural machinery. She warns the reader that she was inspired by Walpole's novel, from which she readapted several elements: as she remarked, her story is the '[l]iterary offspring of *The Castle of Otranto*, written upon the same plan'⁹⁰. Furthermore, the preface

⁸⁷ Reeve, *English Baron*, 60.

⁸⁸ Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 84.

⁸⁹ Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 85.

⁹⁰ Reeve, *English Baron*, 2.

underlines strengths and weaknesses of Walpole's work:

[t]o attain th[e] end [of uniting the ancient Romance and modern Novel], there is required a sufficient degree of the marvelous, to excite the attention; enough of the manners of real life, to give an air of probability to the work; and enough of the pathetic, to engage the heart in its behalf. The book we have mentioned is excellent in the two last points, but has a redundancy in the first; the opening excites the attention very strongly; the conduct of the story is artful and judicious; the characters are admirably drawn and supported; the diction polished and elegant; yet, with all these brilliant advantages, it palls upon the mind (though it does not upon the ear); and the reason is obvious, the machinery is so violent, that it destroys the effect it is intended to excite. Had the story been kept within the utmost verge of probability, the effect had been preserved, without losing the least circumstance that excites or detains the attention⁹¹.

Reeve's judgement of *The Castle of Otranto* is very severe. She praises its narration, characters, and diction; however, Walpole's use of supernatural, in her opinion, weakens his novel. Reeve approves of Walpole's ghosts and enchanted armors, but his fault lies in their gigantic size. As she argues:

[w]e can conceive, and allow of, the appearance of a ghost; we can even dispense with an enchanted sword and helmet; but then they must keep within certain limits of credibility: A sword so large as to require an hundred men to lift it; a helmet that by its own weight forces a passage through a courtyard into an arched vault, big enough for a man to go through; a picture that walks out of its frame; a skeleton ghost in a hermit's cowl:—When your expectation is wound up to the highest pitch, these circumstances take it down with a witness, destroy the work of imagination, and, instead of attention, excite laughter⁹².

⁹¹ Reeve, *English Baron*, 3.

⁹² *Ibidem*.

She, as well as other readers, was disappointed that *The Castle of Otranto* was weakened by its minor faults: as Reeve noted, '[t]he beauties are so numerous, that we cannot bear the defects'⁹³. Therefore, her intention was '[t]o compose a work upon the same plan, wherein these defects might be avoided': as for *Original Poems on Several Occasions*, Reeve's friends supported her work, and '[b]y their approbation [she] was encouraged to proceed'⁹⁴.

Ernest Baker studies how Reeve employed Gothic features in *The Old English Baron* and how she kept her story within the '[l]imits of credibility': in his view, she attempted '[t]o provide the requisite Gothic elements of awe and dread without resorting to the supernatural'⁹⁵. Other critics, like Edith Birkhead, K. K. Mehrotra, and B. G. MacCarthy, judge Reeve's use of supernatural as being '[f]lat', whereas Lorene Catherine Elder argues that Reeve '[i]ncluded the supernatural unwillingly in her story, because Walpole used it'⁹⁶. Despite their different opinions, critics agree overall that Reeve's rationality prevented her work from being successful.

Reeve's criticism of Walpole's work and her decision to keep distance from *The Castle of Otranto*'s '[d]efects' are presented in both the editions of *The Old English Baron*. However, the 1777 *Address* appears '[r]elatively defensive in its dialogue with the reader'⁹⁷, as the author's question '[p]ray did you ever read a book called *The Castle of Otranto*?'⁹⁸ suggests. On the contrary, the preface of 1778 displays Clara Reeve's ambition and boldness in announcing her novel as the '[l]iterary offspring' of Walpole's work.

The final version of the novel was prefaced with a dedication to Martha Bridge, daughter of Samuel Richardson, who is said to have corrected '[t]he errors of the first impression'⁹⁹. The changes at the level of punctuation and vocabulary, for Reeve, took *The Old English Baron* '[o]ut of this degrading dress, and encouraged him to assume a

⁹³ Ibidem.

⁹⁴ Reeve, *English Baron*, 4.

⁹⁵ Ernest A. Baker, *The History of the English Novel* (London, 1934), 179.

⁹⁶ Elder, *Reeve's Gothic background*, 66.

⁹⁷ Watt, *Introduction*, XXVII.

⁹⁸ Reeve, *English Baron*, 137.

⁹⁹ Reeve, *English Baron*, 140.

graceful and ornamental habit'¹⁰⁰.

Despite Bridgen's involvement in the revision process, the nature of her relationship with Reeve's text is hard to quantify¹⁰¹. Bridgen was an influential figure, who probably revised Richardson's *Pamela*, and Reeve's esteem for her and her father is shown not only through her positive reception of Bridgen's changes in *The Old English Baron*, but also through her positive comments on Richardson's works. As Reeve remarks in the preface to the second edition of her novel, '[t]he business of Romance is, first, to excite the attention; and secondly, to direct it to some useful, or at least innocent, end; happy the writer who attains both these points, like Richardson!'¹⁰².

The Old English Baron, the new edition of *The Champion of Virtue*, thus offered a manifesto of Reeve's idea of a romance: with the '[p]atronage and protection'¹⁰³ of Martha Bridgen, the novel was prepared to dismantle the seductive power of the supernatural, in favor of morality and rationality.

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁰¹ Watt, *Introduction*, XXVI.

¹⁰² Reeve, *English Baron*, 3.

¹⁰³ Reeve, *English Baron*, 140.

4. THE LEGACY OF GOTHIC FICTION

4.1 *The Castle of Otranto* versus *The Old English Baron*: Differences and Similarities

Walpole's and Reeve's narration focuses on the discovery of a manuscript. The preface of the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto* introduces Walpole's novel as a '[w]ork [which] was found in the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England. It was printed at Naples, in the black letter, in the year 1529. [...] If the story was written near the time when it is supposed to have happened, it must have been between 1095, the aera of the first crusade, and 1243, the date of the last, or not long afterwards'¹. Reeve presented herself as the editor of a manuscript, *The Champion of Virtue*, which she translated '[i]n the old English language'² for modern readers.

Reeve thus followed the practice of Walpole in the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, introducing herself as a translator of a recovered manuscript, rather than claiming the authorship of her novel. However, both the authors abandoned this device in the second edition of their works. Walpole '[a]sked pardon of his readers for having offered his work to them under the borrowed personage of a translator'³: he explained that '[h]e resigned his performance to the impartial judgment of the public; determined to let it perish in obscurity, if disapproved; nor meaning to avow such a trifle, unless better judges should pronounce that he might own it without a blush'⁴. Reeve, in the preface of *The Old English Baron*, declared that:

[b]y the advice of [...] friends I printed the first Edition [...] and being thus encouraged, I have determined to offer a second Edition to that public which has so often rewarded the efforts of those, who have endeavored to contribute to its entertainment. [...] I have also been prevailed upon, though with extreme reluctance, to suffer my name to appear in the title-page; and I do now, with the utmost respect and

¹ Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (London: Penguin Classics, 2001), 2.

² Reeve, *English Baron*, 139.

³ Walpole, *Otranto*, 12.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

diffidence, submit the whole to the candour of the Public⁵.

As Watt argues, *The Old English Baron* '[n]o longer present[ed] itself as the translation of an ancient manuscript'⁶. However, the critic notes that Reeve omitted to delete an important detail: after Sir Philip arrives in safety at home, the narration is interrupted by '[a]n interval of four years, as by the manuscript; and this omission seems intended by the Writer. What follows is in a different hand, and the character is more modern'⁷. For Watt, *The Old English Baron* dropped *The Champion of Virtue*'s recovered manuscript framework, but traces of the previous edition can still be found despite Bridgen's involvement in the revision process.

The Old English Baron, as well as the narrative device of the manuscript, shares other similarities with *The Castle of Otranto*. Reeve's work indeed engages with Walpole's novel on many levels: both the authors have built their plot around an act of usurpation; the dispossessed heroes are revealed as the true heirs of an ancient castle and claim their rightful place in their family lineage; the villains are related to episodes of murder and betrayal, and the conclusion of both novels is brought about with the help of supernatural machinery.

However, the most tangible way in which *The Old English Baron* took inspiration from *The Castle of Otranto* is displayed through the character of Edmund Twyford, who is '[c]learly modelled on Theodore'⁸. In his analysis of the protagonists of Reeve's and Walpole's novels, Desmond Huthwaite underlines that the nobility of both Edmund and Theodore, even if not acknowledged in the first part of the story, is nonetheless already visible through their manners and behaviors⁹. In the dark passageways where Theodore meets Isabella, the young woman and her maid Bianca observe that '[h]is phrases were becoming a man of gentle birth'¹⁰, and they even suppose that Theodore could be '[s]ome prince in disguise'¹¹. Matilda's subsequent visual experience of Theodore's body confirms her theory.

⁵ Reeve, *English Baron*, 4.

⁶ Watt, *Notes*, 142.

⁷ Reeve, *English Baron*, 19.

⁸ Watt, *Introduction*, IX.

⁹ Desmond Huthwaite, "More and More Fond of Reading": Everything You Wanted to Know about Transgender Studies but Were Afraid to Ask: Clara Reeve, *Humanities* 10: 98 (Cambridge, 2021), 8.

¹⁰ Walpole, *Otranto*, 45.

¹¹ Walpole, *Otranto*, 46.

As Theodore is about to be executed, Father Jerome recognizes the mark on Theodore's skin, an unequivocal evidence of his nobility: '[a]s he stooped, his shirt flipped down below his shoulder, and discovered the mark of a bloody arrow. Gracious heaven! Cried [Father Jerome] starting, what do I see? It is my child! My Theodore!'¹². Moreover, Isabella remarks a similarity between Theodore and Alfonso's faces: indeed, she notes that Theodore is '[t]he exact resemblance of Alfonso's picture in the gallery'¹³.

Therefore, not only Theodore's manners suggest his noble origin, but also his body '[t]ranspires to be marked with an undisputable sign of his noble parentage'¹⁴. Edmund's behavior resembles Theodore's and, as in *The Castle of Otranto*, the characters of *The Old English Baron* recognize that the manners of the protagonist are similar to those of a nobleman. As a result of Edmund's education alongside the sons of Baron Fitz-Owen, '[a]ll who knew him' praised his '[u]ncommon merit, and gentleness of manner'¹⁵.

Sir Philip Harclay, however, seems to be the only person who does not care much about the manners of the young man: indeed, '[a]s [Edmund] drew near, Sir Philip fixed his eyes upon him, with so much attention, that he seemed not to observe his courtesy and address'¹⁶. The knight, more than being interested in his gallantry and politeness, is struck by the physical similarity between Arthur Lovel and Edmund. As Sir Philip observes, '[Edmund's] manner resembles [Arthur's] as much as his person, and his qualities deserve that he should be placed in a higher rank'¹⁷. Once again, the noble origin of the protagonist is displayed through both his manners and physical appearance. In addition, Robert Miles notes that '[although] Edmund's superiority over the peasants is based on superior nurture, this nurture discovers itself within Edmund as an irrepressible impulse towards education, to reading the chivalrous romances that build his character'¹⁸. Edmund's '[i]mpulse towards education' is indeed described by

¹² Walpole, *Otranto*, 57.

¹³ Walpole, *Otranto*, 102.

¹⁴ Huthwaite, *Clara Reeve*, 8.

¹⁵ Reeve, *English Baron*, 14.

¹⁶ Reeve, *English Baron*, 13.

¹⁷ Reeve, *English Baron*, 15.

¹⁸ Robert Miles, *Gothic Writing 1750-1820: A Genealogy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 101.

Margery Twyford, the woman who raised him, during her conversation with Oswald about Edmund's real mother:

[t]here came an old pilgrim into our parts; he was a scholar, and had been a soldier, and he taught Edmund to read; then he told him histories of wars, and knights, and lords, and great men; and Edmund took such delight in hearing him, that he would not take to anything else. [...] As I was a saying, Edmund grew more and more fond of reading, and less of work; however, he would run of errands, and do many handy turns for the neighbours; and he was so courteous a lad, that people took notice of him. Andrew once caught him alone reading, and then told him, that if he did not find some way to earn his bread, he would turn him out of doors in a very short time; and so he would have done, sure enough, if my Lord Fitz-Owen had not taken him into his service just in the nick¹⁹.

Edmund's behavior is thus acquired through his stay at Baron Fitz-Owen's castle, and his ability to read is derived from the lessons taken from a pilgrim and scholar named Edwin. Nevertheless, his predisposition towards reading and acting as a nobleman is a clear hint of his lineage: as Huthwaite argues, '[Edmund's] body seems pre-programmed for this acquisition [and] the symptom of this pre-programming is an impulse to read that seems to be located deep down in the very matter of his body'²⁰.

If similarities between the two heroes, Theodore and Edmund, are found in their manners, physical appearance and impulses, the same cannot be said about their respective enemies, Manfred and Walter Lovel. Walter Scott described Manfred as the best example of feudal tyranny: as he observed, '[Manfred] has the courage, the art, the duplicity, the ambition of a barbarous chieftain of the dark ages, yet with touches of remorse and natural feeling, which preserve some sympathy for him when his pride is quelled, and his race extinguished'²¹. The psychological development of this character is thus complex, a feature that contrasts with the characterization of Sir Walter Lovel

¹⁹ Reeve, *English Baron*, 53.

²⁰ Huthwaite, *Clara Reeve*, 10.

²¹ Scott, *Lives*, 194.

who, for Watt, is '[n]ot developed to the same extent as Walpole's Manfred'²².

Stefan Andriopoulos argues that Manfred's title, being found on murder, exposes him as a usurper²³: the frustration which leads him to scheming against his own family in order to maintain the castle under his possession is therefore a direct consequence of the sins of his ancestors. However, the influence of the past over the present reaches its climax before the conclusion of the story. The lord of the castle of Otranto, blinded by his own paranoia, kills his own daughter Matilda; realizing what he has just done, the tyrant asks his daughter for forgiveness: '[I] took thee for Isabella; but heaven directed my bloody hand to the heart of my child! – Oh! Matilda – I cannot utter it – canst thou forgive the blindness of my rage?'²⁴. This particular psychological feature of the lord of Otranto will become an essential element of Gothic fiction: as Gero Bauer notes, '[M]anfred himself more and more displays the kind of paranoia that will become typical of Gothic masculinities'²⁵. Bauer also underlines the constant presence of Manfred throughout the novel. His paranoia, together with the instability of his title, creates an insecurity which is expressed in the numerous conversations that he engages with several other characters. As Bauer affirms, '[I]ack of voice gets associated with lack of power'²⁶: Manfred's constant scheming and talking are therefore related to his psychological instability, which leads him to an incestuous proposal of marriage and the murder of his own daughter only to secure his properties.

On the contrary, *The Old English Baron* presents a villain who is neither constantly present nor paranoid. James Watt observes that Lord Lovel is '[o]ffstage for most of the work'²⁷: indeed, Sir Walter is even excluded from the first scenes of the novel. Lord Lovel is introduced in the first pages as the brother-in-law of Baron Fitz-Owen to whom he sold the castle; however, no other information about this character is given to the reader, and Lord Lovel is no longer mentioned until Joseph suggests Walter's possible involvement in the murder of Arthur Lovel, which occurs in the middle of Reeve's work.

²² Watt, *Introduction*, IX.

²³ Stefan Andriopoulos, *The Invisible Hand: Supernatural Agency in Political Economy and the Gothic Novel*, ELH 66, no. 3 (Autumn, 1999), 742.

²⁴ Walpole, *Otranto*, 240.

²⁵ Gero Bauer, *Houses, Secrets, and the Closet: Locating Masculinities from the Gothic Novel to Henry James* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2016), 49.

²⁶ Bauer, *Locating Masculinities*, 47.

²⁷ Watt, *Introduction*, IX.

The only significant appearance of Sir Walter is during his duel against Sir Philip Harclay, which is followed by Lord Lovel's confession that enables the conclusion of the story. This scene contains many elements which underline the differences between Manfred and Lovel: not only does it provide an example of the exclusion of Walter from most of the events of the novel, highlighting a situation opposite to that of Manfred, but it also stresses the different nature of *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Old English Baron*. In Walpole's novel, the lord of the castle of Otranto refuses to test his claims in a joust with Frederic; on the contrary, Lord Lovel accepts Harclay's challenge in order to defend his personal honor. Although both villains are recognized as usurpers and traitors, and consequently defeated by the heroes of the novels, the duels described in these two stories present Manfred as a calculating man, whereas Sir Walter Lovel as a fighter, a knight who, even if acknowledged as a murderer, still wants to preserve his honor.

The trial by combat also displays the different nature of Walpole's and Reeve's works: indeed, Miles claims that '[g]othic novels abound with duels [...] *The Old English Baron* stresses the orderly workings of providence, *The Castle of Otranto*, and other Gothic texts, the disorderly workings of duels'²⁸. Providence thus decrees Sir Harclay's victory, underlying the religious aspect of the novel which has already been discussed in the previous chapters. Horace Walpole too was fascinated by medieval Christianity, as the miraculous appearance of Saint Nicholas in the last chapter of *The Castle of Otranto* suggests. However, Walpole's novel focused more on supernatural machinery, whereas *The Old English Baron's* narration employed providence in several dialogues: the word 'God' is indeed used more than thirty times in Reeve's work, 'Providence' thirteen times, and the scenes in which the characters, Edmund in particular, ask for God's protection and forgiveness are numerous and regular throughout the novel.

The superstitious elements of Christianity described in Walpole's and Reeve's novels became an essential feature of Gothic fiction: among others, Sophia Lee and Ann Radcliffe employed religious elements in their works in order to engage the public. As Lorene Elder affirms, the later Gothic novelists '[f]alsified and exaggerated Catholic

²⁸ Miles, *Gothic Writing*, 102.

ceremony and institutions to make an emotional appeal to the reader'²⁹. Therefore, despite their differences, both *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Old English Baron* influenced Gothic writers, who took inspiration from these two important novels to develop and expand the Gothic genre. Villains started being described as scheming, aristocratic, and incestuous antiheroes, who could even murder members of their own families to achieve their goals.

Their complex psychological development thus created evil figures who, however, could also feel remorse. Indeed Manfred, for Miles, embodies the moral of the story, described by Walpole himself in *The Castle of Otranto*'s preface: '[t]he sins of fathers are visited on their children'³⁰. The madness of the lord of Otranto is therefore a consequence of his grandfather's usurpation of the castle, which contributes to his paranoid attitude. However, the complexity of this character also derives from his ability to recognize his own mistakes: after the murder of his own daughter, he asks for forgiveness and '[f]ollow[s] the litter [of Matilda] in despair'³¹. Manfred is thus an example of how Gothic fiction contributed to the creation of villains who are not completely evil but, on the contrary, are 'haunted by the past'³² and able to recognize their own faults, feeling guilt and pain for their misdeeds.

Since Reeve deliberately took inspiration from Walpole's novel, the villain of *The Old English Baron* shares these particular features of Manfred's characterization. Lord Lovel's cruelty seems to derive from an unrequited love: as the servant Joseph hypothesizes, Walter could have been involved in the murder of Arthur because his lady never returned his affection. Later in the novel, Lovel's confession partially confirms Joseph hypothesis:

[Arthur] excelled me in every kind of merit, in the graces of person and mind, in all his exercises, and in every accomplishment. I was totally eclipsed by him, and I hated to be in his company; but what finished my aversion, was his addressing the lady upon whom I had fixed my affections. [...] As soon as I heard he was gone from home, I resolved to prevent his return, exulting in the prospect of possessing

²⁹ Elder, *Reeve's Gothic background*, 64.

³⁰ Walpole, *The Castle Of Otranto*, quoted in Miles, *Gothic Writing*, 103.

³¹ Walpole, *Otranto*, 242.

³² Bauer, *Locating Masculinities*, 57.

his title, fortune, and his lady³³.

Walter's words underline his jealousy towards Arthur's capabilities which, combined to the love he felt for his lady, are pointed as the causes of the murder of Edmund's parents. Nonetheless, despite his cruel actions, Walter experiences regret and guilt: after confessing that his '[m]ind was disturbed by the baleful passion of envy [which was the] root [from which] all [his] bad actions sprung', he felt 'the pangs of remorse' and 'never knew peace since'³⁴. Reeve thus seems to present him as a redeemable character. Banished to 'the Holy Land'³⁵ with Zadisky, Harclay's attendant, he is even given the chance to begin a new life: he is rewarded with a post in the Greek army and eventually marries the daughter of an officer. Moreover, as Watt observes, it is '[s]ignificant that [Reeve's] villain ends the work engaged in the enterprise in which Sir Philip Harclay had earned such distinction – defending the frontier of the Byzantine Empire against the encroachments of the Ottoman Turks'³⁶.

Both *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Old English Baron* thus present a villain who, described at first as pure evil, throughout the novel becomes a redeemable character, whose sins must be related not only to his wickedness but also to his tormented past or his feelings towards other characters. These positive and negative connotations, intertwined and combined together, created a new type of antihero who, as Bridget M. Marshall argues, would become an essential element of later Gothic fiction³⁷.

Religious elements, as previously stated, could support a moral purpose, or provide an historical background to a novel: however, in both cases religion was always opposed to supernatural machinery, a fundamental component of Gothic writing which was explored from different perspectives by Walpole and Reeve. As Watt observes, '[a]s in *The Castle of Otranto*, the final resolution of *The Old English Baron* is brought about with the aid of supernatural agency'³⁸; nonetheless, despite the similar denouement, supernatural machinery is employed differently in these two novels. In

³³ Reeve, *English Baron*, 85.

³⁴ Reeve, *English Baron*, 90.

³⁵ Reeve, *English Baron*, 119.

³⁶ Watt, *Introduction*, XIII.

³⁷ Bridget M. Marshall, 'The face of evil: Phrenology, physiognomy, and the Gothic villain', *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* (HJEAS) 6, no. 2 (2000): 161–72.

³⁸ Watt, *Introduction*, IX.

Walpole's, the supernatural is employed on several occasions: in the first lines of the novel, an ancient prophecy warned that '[t]he castle and lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it'³⁹, prophecy which is fulfilled through the several apparitions, in numerous sections of the novel, of parts of the gigantic armor of Alfonso, former prince of Otranto. In addition, Frederic's premonitions, which warned him that her daughter was in danger, his encounter with a skeleton who presented himself as a '[h]oly hermit'⁴⁰ that he met long ago in the wood of Joppa, and several mentions of ghostly appearances, display a usage of supernatural in every chapter of *The Castle of Otranto*.

Nick Groom argues that in Walpole's work '[d]reams direct the action [of the novel]. Dreams are supernatural, sublime, and dangerous'⁴¹. For Groom, it is natural that dreams and supernatural guide the reader through the mysteries of the castle of Otranto, since Walpole confessed to his friend William Cole that the whole story of *The Castle of Otranto* was inspired by a dream:

[I] waked one morning in the beginning of last June from a dream, of which all I could recover was, that I had thought myself in an ancient castle (a very natural dream for a head fille like mine with Gothic story) and that on the uppermost bannister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour...I was very glad to think of anything rather than politics⁴².

On the contrary, *The Old English Baron* employs supernatural machinery only to allow the resolution of the novel. Supernatural presences are sporadic and related exclusively to the murder of Arthur Lovel, whose real cause of death enables Edmund to claim his rightful name and fortune. Clery affirms that Reeve '[h]esitantly indulged [on] terror [and] unreason'⁴³, and Scott's analysis of *The Old English Baron* confirms this statement. Indeed, the author of *Waverley* claims that:

³⁹ Walpole, *Otranto*, 31.

⁴⁰ Walpole, *Otranto*, 235.

⁴¹ Groom, *The Gothic*, 70

⁴² Walpole, *Confession to Cole*, quoted in Nick Groom, *The Gothic*, 71.

⁴³ Clery, *Women's Gothic*, 36.

[Reeve] is very felicitously cautious in showing us no more of Lord Lovel's ghost than she needs must. He is a silent apparition, palpable to the sight only, and never brought forward into such broad daylight as might have dissolved our reverence. And so far, we repeat, the authoress has used her own power to the utmost advantage, and gained her point by not attempting a step beyond it⁴⁴.

The nature and purpose of Reeve's ghost thus differs from that of Walpole. Alfonso's gigantic size is preannounced by the discovery of his huge helmet and sword, and his last appearance is introduced with a sinister and threatening description: '[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'⁴⁵. Furthermore, Walpole's ghost main purpose is to frighten the read, and his only contribution to the plot is that of confirming Theodore's true identity, which was already been revealed before Alfonso's appearance. On the contrary, Lord Lovel's ghost leads Edmund to revenge the murder of his parents, contributing to the resolution of the story. Moreover, Reeve's ghost seems to frighten only the evil characters of the story, and his appearances are occasional and brief.

Few other supernatural events occur in *The Old English Baron* which, for Elder, indicate '[a] certain amount of plagiarism on Miss Reeve's part'⁴⁶. In *The Castle of Otranto*, Frederic approaches the castle, whereas Manfred is opening the doors to receive him. The giant helmet of Alfonso seems to welcome him, by waving its giant plumes: '[Frederic] approached the gate. [...] Manfred's [...] attention was soon diverted by a tempest of wind that rose behind him. He turned and beheld the Plumes of the enchanted helmet agitated'⁴⁷. A similar scene is found in *The Old English Baron*: when Edmund approaches the castle that belonged to his family, the castle itself, as Watt noted, rejects the usurping Sir Walter Lovel⁴⁸. Indeed, its doors '[o]pened without any assistance' to welcome the true heir of Arthur Lovel; as Joseph claims in the novel, '[t]hese doors open of their own accord to receive their master'⁴⁹. A further instance of Reeve's reworking of *The Castle of Otranto* is the description of Isabella's escape

⁴⁴ Scott, *Lives*, 202.

⁴⁵ Walpole, *Otranto*, 249.

⁴⁶ Elder, *Reeve's Gothic background*, 71.

⁴⁷ Walpole, *Otranto*, 140.

⁴⁸ Watt, *Introduction*, XIX.

⁴⁹ Reeve, *English Baron*, 113.

through a secret passage of the castle. While she was running from Manfred, she ‘[h]eard the step of some person. Her blood curdled; she concluded it was Manfred’; however, when she held up her lamp to discover his identity, ‘[a] sudden gust of wind that met her at the door extinguished her lamp, and left her in total darkness’⁵⁰. Edmund’s discovery of the ghost of his father is ‘[c]learly patterned after this episode’⁵¹. While investigating the ‘[h]ollow rustling noise’⁵² heard in the west wing of Lovel castle, Edmund set the lamp on the ground, in order to open the door to examine a suspicious room. Reeve’s description is clearly inspired by Walpole’s⁵³: ‘[e]xerting all his strength, [he] opened the door, and at the same instant the wind of it blew out the lamp, and left him in utter darkness’⁵⁴.

Despite some evident similarities, supernatural machinery in *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Old English Baron* serves different purposes, which are displayed in the conclusion of both novels. The castle of Otranto self-destructs at the close of Walpole’s novel, while the castle of Lovel accepts the return of its rightful heir; whereas Theodore ‘[d]oes generational battle to supplant the incestuous father’, Edmund desires ‘[t]he father’s emotional and legal acceptance’⁵⁵. Watt claims that supernatural, in *The Castle of Otranto*, ‘[d]escribes the way in which the past erupts to haunt and destabilize the present’, whereas in *The Old English Baron* it ‘[r]ecovers the past so as to exorcize corruption and to confirm the legitimacy of its hero’⁵⁶. As Elder argues, it is evident that Clara Reeve valued and recognized the supernatural element in her novel: this is the reason why she cannot be considered ‘[a] servile imitator [of Walpole]’⁵⁷. On the contrary, ‘[h]er handling and tone differs from Walpole’s deliberately’ and, in Elder’s opinion, ‘[t]o good effect’⁵⁸.

⁵⁰ Walpole, *Otranto*, 87.

⁵¹ Elder, *Reeve’s Gothic background*, 72.

⁵² Reeve, *English Baron*, 37.

⁵³ Clery, *Women’s Gothic*, 34.

⁵⁴ Reeve, *English Baron*, 38.

⁵⁵ Jones, *Literature in Britain*, 116.

⁵⁶ Watt, *Introduction*, XXIV.

⁵⁷ Elder, *Reeve’s Gothic background*, 73.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

4.2 Waverley: the Past Flows into the Present

As in *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Old English Baron*, in *Waverley* too the ‘[p]ast flows into the present’⁵⁹, as Sandra Guardini observes. Not only did the anonymous publication of this novel in 1814 present multiple relations between fiction and history, reality and supernatural, ancient and modern, but it also contributed, as Ian Duncan notes, to the ‘[i]nstitutional formation of modern narrative’⁶⁰.

The story opens with Edward Waverley, a young English soldier who spent his childhood reading romances among the comforts of Waverley-Honour, the aristocratic family home. He is then convinced by his father to join the Hanoverian army in Dundee; however, after some military training, he leaves to visit Baron Bradwardine, a friend of his Jacobite uncle, Sir Everard Waverley. Edward meets the Baron’s daughter, Rose, but his infatuation for her is quickly replaced by his love for Flora, the sister of Clan Mac-Ivor’s chieftain Fergus, whom he meets after wild Highlanders visit the Baron’s castle. Edward is accused of desertion and arrested, but the highlanders rescue and escort him to Doune Castle, where he meets Bonnie Prince Charlie. Being charmed by Flora and grateful for the hospitality he received, he joins the Jacobite cause: he takes part in the Battle of Prestonpans, but the government troops win the conflict. Edward gets separated from the Jacobite army and, before leaving the battle, he saves the Hanoverian Colonel Talbot, a friend of his uncle Everard. The protagonist returns to London because of his father’s death and, after the unsuccess of the Jacobite rebellion in 1746, Talbot gets him a pardon. Edward visits what remains of Bradwardine’s estate and asks for his daughter’s hand: the marriage is confirmed, and the Baron is pardoned too. Flora joins a convent in France, whereas his brother Fergus is condemned to death. With Edward’s arrival to Waverley-Honour, the preparations for the wedding begin, and the Baron’s estate is restored by using Edward’s funds.

The ‘[h]istorical geography’ of the novel, as Duncan claims, presents *Waverley* as ‘[a] journey back in time’⁶¹. Past and present are thus represented through Edward’s

⁵⁹ Sandra Guardini Teixeira Vasconcelos, *Wavering over bordelines: History and Fiction in Walter Scott*, *A Journal of English Language, Literatures in English and Cultural Studies*, no. 57 (2009), 144.

⁶⁰ Ian Duncan, *Modern Romance and the transformation of the novel: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 51.

⁶¹ Ian Duncan, *Waverley*, from *Il romanzo*, Moretti, Franco, vol.II (Torino: Einaudi, 2002), 136.

journey from England to Scotland, two countries which oppose ancient and modern, passion and duty, dreams and reality. Being geography the '[f]oundation of [the] narrative form [...] of the historical novel', Franco Moretti remarks that *Waverley* presents different epochs through an opposition between '[t]he man from England and the [savage] woman from the Lowlands', between '[a] national union based on the agreement'⁶² and the more sophisticated and educated English community. The different values offered by the novel are shown in one of the final scenes of *Waverley*, where a painting represents Edward's adventure in the Highlands:

[i]t was a large and spirited painting, representing Fergus Mac-Ivor and Waverley in their Highland dress, the scene a wild, rocky, and mountainous pass, down which the clan were descending in the background. It was taken from a spirited sketch, drawn while they were in Edinburgh by a young man of high genius, and had been painted on a full-length scale by an eminent London artist. Raeburn himself (whose "Highland Chiefs" do all but walk out of the canvas) could not have done more justice to the subject; and the ardent, fiery, and impetuous character of the unfortunate Chief of Glennaquoich was finely contrasted with the contemplative, fanciful, and enthusiastic expression of his happier friend. Beside this painting hung the arms which Waverley had borne in the unfortunate civil war. The whole piece was beheld with admiration and deeper feelings⁶³

As Duncan observes, even if the Highlands clans '[d]issolved as a social system', their values '[c]an be reclaimed in the form of cultural capital; empire renews itself ideologically through the absorption of primitive virtues of courage and loyalty'⁶⁴. Past and present coexist in the final moments of *Waverley*, even though the values of the Highlanders, more than being assimilated and internalized, are '[c]onverted [...] to trophies or souvenirs'⁶⁵. Besides, Duncan highlights that the painting '[c]ommemorates the romance of [Edward's] life rather than its real history': Waverley's rebel arms,

⁶² Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (London: Verso Books, 1999), 38-40.

⁶³ Walter Scott, *Waverley* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2015), 373.

⁶⁴ Duncan, *Waverley*, 137.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

displayed as ornaments in his '[d]omestic heaven', represent the '[m]elancholy recognition of defeat'⁶⁶. Romance is thus a word which Scott '[f]ixed in its modern, double usage': Duncan claims that *Waverley* narrates '[t]he history of [the] formation [of this literary] genre'; however, the romance is also '[a] medium [...] through which we may imagine our relation to past and present conditions'⁶⁷.

Furthermore, the virtues of the past which are forgotten by modern society are displayed also in the *Postscript, which should have been a Preface of Waverley*. Scott's description of '[S]cottish faith, hospitality, worth, [loyalty], and honour'⁶⁸ recalls the representation of the chivalric virtues in *The Old English Baron*, analyzed in chapter 3. Therefore, both authors, despite the different nature of their works, attempted to '[p]reserv[e] some idea of the ancient manners'⁶⁹, by providing a historical background which could also highlight the forgotten values of ancient times.

Supernatural is another feature of *Waverley* which connects past and present. As Enrica Villari argues, even though *Waverley* is defined as an historical novel, Scott's work contains elements which are in contrast with historical values, such as the comic, the tragic, and the supernatural⁷⁰. The supernatural machinery is employed through the character of Fergus Mac-Ivor who, before taking part in the battle in Clifton after which he will be executed, urges Edward to come back to England. Fergus gives his friend two reasons why he must leave, one of which has a supernatural nature. The previous night, a 'Grey Spectre' came to Fergus and foretold his death. Even if Edward does not believe his words, the chieftain of Clan Mac-Ivor describes the Grey Spectre, whose origin is related to the sins of Fergus' ancestors:

[y]ou must know, then, that when my ancestor, Ian nan Chaistel, wasted Northumberland, there was associated with him in the expedition a sort of Southland Chief, or captain of a band of Lowlanders, called Halbert Hall. In their return through the Cheviots they quarrelled about the division of the great booty they had

⁶⁶ Duncan, *Waverley*, 140.

⁶⁷ Duncan, *Waverley*, 139.

⁶⁸ Scott, *Waverley*, 376.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁰ Enrica Villari, *La resistenza alla storia nei romanzi giacobiti di Walter Scott*, from *Storie su storie* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1985), 5.

acquired, and came from words to blows. The Lowlanders were cut off to a man, and their chief fell the last, covered with wounds by the sword of my ancestor. Since that time his spirit has crossed the Vich Ian Vohr of the day when any great disaster was impending, but especially before approaching death. My father saw him twice, once before he was made prisoner at Sheriff-Muir, another time on the morning of the day on which he died.⁷¹

The same name (Vich Ian Vhor) and destiny connects Fergus to his ancestors, as Villari notes⁷²: for three hundred years the Grey Spectre has met numerous chieftains of Clan Mac-Ivor before their death and, just like Fergus' father '[s]aw him before he was made prisoner at Sheriff-Muir', the last Mac-Ivor too meets the Spectre before being taken as prisoner and then executed.

The ghost of *Waverley* also shares some similarities with the supernatural presences of *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Old English Baron*. Walpole claims in his preface that his novel displays how '[t]he sins of fathers are visited on their children to the third and fourth generation'⁷³. *The Castle of Otranto* indeed highlights how the sins of the ancestors of Manfred have effects on the following generations: not only does the usurpation drive the protagonist mad, but it also leaves Manfred without any possession, after Theodore claims his rightful place in the castle with the aid of Alfonso's apparition. The Grey Spectre of *Waverley* too is related to the sins committed by Fergus' ancestors, which influence the lives of the future generations: because Ian nan Chaistel murdered Halbert Hall, the Grey Spectre has visited every Vich Ian Vhor before their death, as a reminder of the crime committed by their ancestor.

The Grey Spectre is thus a victim who comes back to life, as a ghost, to pursue his goal: to haunt the new generations of Vich Ian Vhor. A similar idea is developed in *The Old English Baron* too. Arthur Lovel is indeed a victim of Walter's envy: his murder makes Walter a usurper, who aspired to possess '[Edward's] title, fortune, and lady'⁷⁴. However, the appearance of Arthur's ghost allows Edmund to claim his rightful place in the family lineage: thus, the aim of Reeve's ghost is to be avenged and to make sure that

⁷¹ Scott, *Waverley*, 305.

⁷² Villari, *La resistenza*, 5.

⁷³ Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, 7.

⁷⁴ Reeve, *English Baron*, 85.

his son inherit the family castle. Despite the different nature of these works, *Waverley*'s ghost displays some features which are found also in *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Old English Baron*. The Grey Spectre is a supernatural presence which represents the sins of the ancestors: the ghost therefore connects past and present, and becomes an example of how *Waverley*'s supernatural resists history⁷⁵.

Regarding the similarities between Scott's and Reeve's novels, other examples can be provided. The analysis of *The Old English Baron* in chapter 3 stressed the femininity of Edmund Twyford: a similar feature is found also in *Waverley*, whose protagonist is described by Duncan as a '[f]emale quixote, whose imagination suspends her from intercourse with society'⁷⁶. Moreover, the prose fiction at that period was dominated by female authors such as Mary Brunton, Amelia Opie and Jane Austen, and as Duncan observes, the novel '[d]eclined into effeminacy since the golden age of Fielding and Richardson'⁷⁷. These were important factors that Scott kept in mind while writing *Waverley*. As Duncan claims, Edward's femininity manifests itself primarily through the passivity of this character. For him, *Waverley* is '[a]n adventure made fit for heroic terms [...] by being committed decisively to the past'⁷⁸; the pastness of heroic violence, however, is replaced with the passivity of a modern hero. Nevertheless, Duncan argues that passivity means '[s]omething else besides a disqualification from low-life masculine imperatives of action and ambition: it is culturally registered as a positively feminine characteristic'⁷⁹. In addition, Edward's feminine connotations are also presented through his exteriority. He is described '[r]ather elegant than robust'⁸⁰ and while wearing the costume of the Jacobite cause, the hairy and wild Evan Dhu approves his uniform with irony: the word 'pratty' is indeed used to refer not to a handsome man, but to a warlike soldier, thus the meaning reflects back only upon Evan Dhu himself⁸¹.

Waverley's passivity could also reflect the lack of paternal guidance: as Duncan claims, '[o]ur hero has too many fathers because he lacks one, in whom biological

⁷⁵ Villari, *La resistenza*, 7.

⁷⁶ Duncan, *Modern Romance*, 63.

⁷⁷ Ibidem.

⁷⁸ Duncan, *Modern Romance*, 64.

⁷⁹ Duncan, *Modern Romance*, 65.

⁸⁰ Scott, *Waverley*, 223.

⁸¹ Duncan, *Modern Romance*, 66.

paternity and patriarchal exemplarity might coincide'⁸². Edward's 'many fathers' could be indicated as: his blood-father Richard, who deserted the family's traditional political identity and convinced his son to join the Hanoverian army; his uncle Everard, who maintained the family's Jacobite sympathies; the Baron Bradwardine, who welcomed Edward to his castle and blessed Edward's union with his daughter Rose. Every one of them plays an important role in the protagonist's life; nevertheless, none of them succeeds in establishing himself as a dominant figure above the others. This peculiar feature is found also in *The Old English Baron*: as Miles affirms, Edmund '[h]as five [benevolent fathers]: biological, foster and holy, one by adoption and another through marriage'⁸³.

The sensibility of Edward thus replaces the strong heroic protagonist of the past: the modern hero is passive, feminine, and lives in the domestic space of private life, features which were already present in Reeve's novel. As the character of Flora Mac-Ivor notes in the novel, '[n]otwithstanding [Edward's] dreams of tented fields and military honour, seemed exclusively domestic'⁸⁴. The protagonist will never fulfill his desire to succeed in battle and become one of the heroes he read about at Waverley-Honour, because his passive nature will lead him to a secure marriage with Rosa and to a comfortable life in the intimacy of his domestic walls. Thus, imagination works '[a]t the service of the romance of domestic felicity'⁸⁵: Edward's infatuation with the Jacobite rebellion, and with the savage and beautiful Flora Mac-Ivor, represent a love for the values of the past, which cannot remain in the present except as trophies or ornaments.

As Duncan beautifully summarizes, *Waverley* provides '[h]eroic death for others, sedentary life for a subject who looks on'⁸⁶. Edward's journey thus offers a tour of the Highlands, a '[g]eographical space of an earlier historical phase, of primitive and authentic types of patriarchal life'. In addition, the Jacobite martyrdom is not only a political, but also '[a]n aesthetic event that confirms Waverley in the role of liberal

⁸² Duncan, *Modern Romance*, 67.

⁸³ Miles, *Gothic Writing*, 101.

⁸⁴ Scott, *Waverley*, 248.

⁸⁵ Duncan, *Modern Romance*, 74.

⁸⁶ Duncan, *Modern Romance*, 84.

subject, who arrives, watches, sympathetically suffers, and departs'⁸⁷.

Imagination and supernatural machinery are therefore elements which can only survive in a geographical space as the Highlands: a territory where both the values of the past and the unknown are still present, far from the rationality and virtues of modern society. Walter Scott, who praised Gothic authors such as Horace Walpole and condemned others such as Clara Reeve, cultivated and absorbed some of the characteristics of this genre into his novel, but employed them with a historical imprint. Consequently, supernatural survives outside of modern society, confined to forgotten places whose antiquity allows the possibility of evading rationality.

⁸⁷ Duncan, *Modern Romance*, 89.

CONCLUSIONS

The word 'Gothic' has always been associated with barbarity, disorder, and violence. Nick Groom's analysis of the origin of this term describes a particular type of architecture opposed to the order and perfection of the classics. Bramante and Vasari are indeed just two of the many famous artists, mentioned by Groom, who condemned this new conception of art. However, despite its rejection, some important authors like Horace Walpole and William Beckford recognized its value: not only did these writers build up villas (respectively Strawberry Hill and Fonthill Abbey) whose details were inspired by Gothic architecture, but they also contributed to the establishment of Gothic novel. Poetry too was influenced by these new ideas: in the first half of the eighteenth century, Graveyard poetry was in vogue. Ruins, shadows, and ghosts challenged, but not replaced, the rationality of the modern society. Indeed, Robert Blair and Edward Young contemplated death and darkness not as obscure and supernatural forces: on the contrary, these elements were described by Blair and Young as symbols of hope for a better future in the afterlife.

Therefore, some features of Gothic culture started being accepted by writers and some of them, like Richard Hurd, even defended Gothic tradition by challenging Neoclassical criticism. In his *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762), Hurd argued that Gothic and classic architecture were not so different, and that even praised authors such as Shakespeare, Ariosto, and Milton, were '[s]educ[ed] by these barbarities of their forefathers'¹. Gothic novels were thus a natural development of literature, which also contained and presented new ideas and theories, such as Edmund Burke's notion of sublime. Dangerous natural landscapes, for Burke, evoked both pleasure and horror: a connection between delight and terror was thus established by the theory of sublime, which challenged the rationalism of society. Burke's treatise, together with Graveyard poetry, thus played a central role in the foundation of Gothic fiction. The new interest towards antiquity, death, and supernatural presences, as well as the new conception of nature as a dangerous place, once considered as an example of order and perfection, questioned the rationalism of the eighteenth-century society. As David Punter argues,

¹ Hurd, *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762), 4.

the '[f]eeling and passion' of Gothic fiction satisfied the '[a]ctual taste' of readers and crushed the '[b]alance and reason of the Enlightenment'².

In 1764, Horace Walpole published *The Castle of Otranto*: as Gero Bauer notes, with this novel he '[i]naugurated the genre of Gothic fiction'³. James Watt claims that Walpole, despite the supernatural machinery employed in his masterpiece, desired to reconsider '[t]he so-called Gothic romance from a historical perspective'⁴. Although Walpole's insertion of historical details was sporadic in *The Castle of Otranto*, the author employed the medieval setting in order to present contemporary uncertainty.

Therefore, a connection between history and the occult was established, and supernatural itself embodied the '[i]nfluence of the past over the present'⁵. Moreover, some of the elements of *The Castle of Otranto*, such as the figure of the tyrannical lord, secret paternities, and apparition of ghosts and other supernatural presences, became essential features of later Gothic novels. Thus, not only did *The Castle of Otranto* present itself as a manifesto of '[t]he revival of imagination in an era that privileged rationality'⁶, but it also challenged the notion of history, conceiving a feature which would later become a classic element of every Gothic story: the past which haunts the present.

In 1777, thirteen years after *The Castle of Otranto*'s appearance, Clara Reeve published *The Old English Baron* and defined her work as the '[l]iterary offspring of *The Castle of Otranto*, written upon the same plan'⁷. Her intention was to remove supernatural features, whose excess '[d]estroyed the work of imagination [of *The Castle of Otranto*]: as she argued, '[i]nstead of attention, [they] excite[d] laughter'⁸. Therefore, Reeve composed '[a] work upon the same plan, wherein these defects [were carefully] avoided'⁹. When Horace Walpole heard about this novel, he dismissed *The Old English Baron* as 'an imitation of *Otranto*, but reduced to reason and probability'¹⁰.

² Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, 26.

³ Bauer, *Locating Masculinities*, 45.

⁴ Watt, *Contesting the Gothic*, 1.

⁵ Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 73.

⁶ Watt, *Contesting the Gothic*, 1.

⁷ Reeve, *English Baron*, 2.

⁸ Reeve, *English Baron*, 3.

⁹ Reeve, *English Baron*, 4.

¹⁰ Walpole, *Correspondence*, XXVIII, 381.

Walter Scott too condemned Reeve's novel due to her lack of imagination: *The Old English Baron* was, for the author of *Waverley*, just an '[o]rdinary fiction'¹¹ written by a mediocre imitator.

Reeve's novel thus cannot be praised for its originality; however, the author created a unique Gothic novel by trying to cultivate and develop new features for this emerging literary genre. Reeve was indeed one of the first authors to provide an accurate historical background and to employ a moderate use of supernatural machinery which, as Emma Clery claims, would become essential elements of female Gothic writings¹². Sophia Lee's *The Recess* and Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* are indeed just two examples of how female Gothic novels developed and shaped Gothic literature, by providing a new kind of Gothic fiction which relied more on suspense and less on supernatural terror. Historical backgrounds and ambiguous, unclear situations, thus replaced detailed descriptions of supernatural presences, introducing probability and reason in a genre that up to that time presented implausible stories with ghostly apparitions.

The historical details of *The Old English Baron* are numerous and lent credence to the events of the story. The novel opens with Sir Philip Harclay's return to England, under the reign of Henry VI; later in the novel, the protagonist Edmund serves under the Duke of York and Regent of France, Richard Plantagenet; in the conclusion, the villain Walter Lovel spends the rest of his life serving under John Palaeologus, before the downfall of Constantinople. In addition to mentions of historical figures, Clara Reeve created a believable medieval setting by representing with accuracy the chivalric code of conduct. The trial by combat which involves Sir Philip Harclay and Lord Lovel is described with particular attention to the procedures of the trial, adding realism to Reeve's story. Moreover, the chivalric virtues of Middle Ages are displayed through different characters: courage, the first '[e]ssential quality of a knight'¹³ for Richard Hurd, is embodied by Sir Philip Harclay, who '[d]istinguished his courage against the encroachments of the Saracens'¹⁴ and who challenges Walter Lovel to protect Edmund (son of his friend Arthur Lovel) from a dangerous combat. Other chivalric virtues are

¹¹ Scott, *Lives*, 201.

¹² Clery, *Women's Gothic*, 31.

¹³ Hurd, *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, 92.

¹⁴ Reeve, *English Baron*, 5.

displayed throughout the novel: hospitality, for example, is offered by different characters, such as Baron Fitz-Owen, Lord Clifford, and Lord Graham, to all travelers, and extended not only to a restricted group of friends or relatives, but also to a large number of strangers. Even acts of generosity and chastity are performed, respectively by Sir Philip Harclay and Edmund Twyford. When Harclay comes back home from France, for example, he helps disable veterans and old servants by employing his wealth to relieve people from their financial distresses, playing a central role in the moral purpose of Reeve's novel. Edmund, a valorous and gentle knight, falls in love with Emma Fitz-Owen and expresses his love through acts of courtesy; however, unless he is recognized as the rightful heir of Arthur Lovel, he dares not reveal his affection because of the respect he feels towards Baron Fitz-Owen who, despite his peasant origin, welcomed him in his castle as if he was one of his sons. After Edmund and Emma's marriage, the couple behaves '[w]ith solemn respect to each other, but with apparent reserve'¹⁵, and the only concrete expression of their love is the kiss Edmund gives to Emma's hand: chastity and respect are thus illustrated in the final part of the novel, underlying the moral purpose of *The Old English Baron*.

Moreover, religious elements were employed by Reeve, together with chivalric virtues, to create a believable historical background. Father Oswald repeats the paternoster while investigating the haunted wing of Lovel castle; later he prays on his knees, and follows his companions with a rosary in his hand. Sir Philip Harclay, on his way back home, '[s]topped at the place where his faithful servant was buried, and caused masses to be said for the repose of his soul'¹⁶. Even the villain of the story, Walter Lovel, praises God to obtain forgiveness for his sins and confesses his crimes to a priest, whose words suggest the redemption of this character.

Reeve's adoption of Catholic tradition thus stresses the historical fidelity of her novel and limits the excess of supernatural found in the literary Gothic tradition. Supernatural occurrences are indeed sporadic in *The Old English Baron*: except for the description of mysterious sounds coming from the dark rooms of the west wing of Lovel castle, and Edmund's vision of his dead parents, no paranormal elements are tolerated in Reeve's narrative. Being the '[I]terary offspring of *The Castle of Otranto*', Reeve's novel aimed

¹⁵ Reeve, *English Baron*, 115.

¹⁶ Reeve, *English Baron*, 22.

to '[k]eep [imagination] within certain limits of credibility'¹⁷. Indeed Reeve, although she praised *The Castle of Otranto* for its narration, characters, and diction, believed that Walpole's use of supernatural weakened his novel: a minor fault, for Reeve, who argued that '[t]he beauties [in *The Castle of Otranto*] are so numerous, that we cannot bear the defects'¹⁸.

Reeve's admiration for Walpole's novel is displayed through several similarities between *The Old English Baron* and *The Castle of Otranto*. The first edition of both novels was published anonymously and focused its narration on the narrative device of a recovered manuscript; moreover, both authors then asked pardon of their readers and published a second edition with their names on the title page. Not only the introduction, but also *The Old English Baron*'s plot engages with *The Castle of Otranto* on many levels: the act of usurpation (which enables the development of the story) and the conclusion (which ends the narration with the help of supernatural machinery), underline a narrative structure which recalls Walpole's novel.

Reeve's characters too are modelled on *The Castle of Otranto*'s protagonists, as her dispossessed hero, who is revealed as the true heir on an ancient castle, and the respective villain, who is later discovered to be a murderer and a betrayer, demonstrate. Indeed, James Watt highlights that Edmund Twyford is '[c]learly modelled on Theodore'¹⁹; in addition, Desmond Huthwaite underlines that both Edmund and Theodore's manners resemble those of noblemen, although both protagonists are presented, in the beginning of the story, as peasants.

Nevertheless, the differences between Reeve's and Walpole's narration are what made *The Old English Baron* a unique novel which influenced the later Gothic fiction. Although, as stated before, both Manfred and Walter Lovel are villains motivated by self-interest who scheme against the respective protagonists, the development and evolution of these characters is different. The psychological development of Manfred is indeed complex: being a usurper, his insecurity and frustration lead him to murder his own daughter Matilda. Therefore, his paranoia, together with his mental instability, develop an unpredictable character that is constantly on stage, plotting against his own

¹⁷ Reeve, *English Baron*, 3.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ Watt, *Introduction*, IX.

family in order to secure the possession of his castle. However, before the conclusion, Manfred asks for forgiveness for his sins: thus, Walpole created an evil character that could also feel remorse, a particular characterization which influenced later Gothic writings, Reeve's in particular.

Therefore, as Watt observes, Manfred's figure can be summarized by two essential features: ambition and duplicity. On the contrary, Sir Walter Lovel is not developed to the same extent as Manfred. Reeve's villain is indeed offstage for most of the work and, except for the introduction of his character in the first pages of *The Old English Baron*, Lord Lovel is no longer mentioned until the trial by combat scene, which occurs in the second part of the novel. Moreover, the combat underlines further differences between Manfred and Lovel: in *The Castle of Otranto*, Manfred refuses to test his claims in a joust with Frederic, whereas Lord Lovel accepts Harclay's challenge in order to defend his honor. These two divergent situations thus underline the different nature of these characters: cunning and deceptive for the former, aristocratic and arrogant for the latter. Furthermore, Sir Philip Harclay's victory is decreed by Providence, which underlines the religious aspect of the novel; Walpole's novel relied on supernatural machinery to conclude the narration instead.

Despite their differences, both Manfred and Sir Walter Lovel feel remorse before the conclusion of their stories. Indeed, Reeve's villain confesses his crimes to a priest and begins a new life serving the Byzantine Empire: once again, Reeve stressed the moral purpose of her novel, and replaced supernatural features found in *The Castle of Otranto*'s denouement with realism, justice, and integrity.

Supernatural thus becomes the feature which differentiates *The Castle of Otranto* from *The Old English Baron*. Walpole's novel employs supernatural on several occasions: the ancient prophecy fulfilled through the numerous apparitions of Alfonso's gigantic armor, Frederic's premonitions, his encounter with a skeleton, and Saint Nicholas' appearance, are just few examples of Walpole's use of supernatural machinery. On the contrary, Reeve limited supernatural elements: Arthur Lovel's ghost is indeed the only paranormal presence mentioned in the novel, whereas other mysterious situations are later explained with the aid of reason.

Therefore, the conclusions of both novels summarize the different aims of these two

Gothic tales: if on the one hand *The Castle of Otranto*'s story ends with the destruction of the castle, which represents the past's eruption to haunt the present with supernatural presences, on the other *The Old English Baron* allows the recovery of the past by concluding its story with an accurate description of the redistribution of land and inheritance, which stresses the moral purpose of Reeve's novel.

Reeve's decision to limit supernatural in her novel, however, was poorly received by authors like Walter Scott who, especially in the first part of his career, was passionate about Gothic fiction and in contact with renowned Gothic writers such as Matthew Gregory Lewis. Scott did not tolerate Reeve's lack of imagination, and in his *Lives of the Novelists* the author of *Waverley* dismissed *The Old English Baron* as an imitation of *The Castle of Otranto*. He indeed praised Walpole's novel as one of the most important Gothic works, which could not be compared to Reeve's writings, even though this '[a]imable and accomplished authoress'²⁰ was nonetheless a great writer. Her secluded situation and her cautious use of supernatural machinery, for Scott, were the reasons of her mediocre result: Reeve's decision to limit the extravagance and excess found in *The Castle of Otranto* was therefore the cause of her lack of success, since supernatural was, for the author of *Waverley*, an essential element of Gothic fiction. Moreover, even if *Waverley* is generally regarded as the first historical novel, Scott introduced some supernatural features such as the Grey Spectre, a ghost which, as in Walpole's novel, represents the past which haunts the present. However, Scott confined supernatural agency outside modern society, focusing his narration on historical details and more realistic elements which contrast with the mysterious and supernatural forces of the past. Therefore, Scott's supernatural survives in places far from the rational society of the present, representing the values of the past which are no longer present in the modern world.

In conclusion, it is unlikely that *The Old English Baron* may conquer the favor of modern readers in the same way as *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and *The Monk* do. However, Clara Reeve's historical background and her particular use of supernatural machinery influenced later Gothic novels, playing an important role in shaping Gothic's literature. As Watt claims, Reeve's most famous novel explored new

²⁰ Scott, *Prose Works*, 334.

possibilities for Gothic fiction, and '[i]ts resonance belies the critical reputation it initially acquired at the hands of Walpole and Scott as a limited, simply derivative, work'²¹.

The interplay of Gothic and historicity in *The Old English Baron* makes it a truly experimental piece of art: therefore, it is safe to say that Reeve's work constitutes a milestone in the history of Gothic fiction and English novel.

²¹ Watt, *Introduction*, XXIV.

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