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Abstract
Anyone familiar with the preface to The Old English Baron: A Gothic Story (1777–80) would be struck with Clara Reeve's proprietary, yet circumspect, adoption of Horace Walpole's own "Gothic Story," The Castle of Otranto (1764):

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Abby Coykendall

> Whatever cause there may be to blame his *Machines* in a philosophical or religious view, they are yet so perfect in the poetic ... and after all the various changes of times and religions, his Gods continue to this day to be the Gods of Poetry.—Alexander Pope[1]

Anyone familiar with the preface to *The Old English Baron: A Gothic Story* (1777–80) would be struck with Clara Reeve's proprietary, yet circumspect, adoption of Horace Walpole's own "Gothic Story," *The Castle of Otranto* (1764):

> This Story is the literary offspring of the Castle of Otranto, written upon the same plan, with a design to unite the most attractive and interesting circumstances of the ancient Romance and the modern Novel … . It is distinguished by the appellation of a Gothic Story, being a picture of Gothic times and manners. I beg leave to conduct my reader back [to] the Castle of Otranto. The machinery is so violent, that it destroys the effect it is intended to excite. 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 laughter.[2]

1 Alexander Pope, "The Marvellous Fable," preface to *The Iliad of Homer* (London: Frederick Wayne, 1883), xii.

2 Clara Reeve, *The Old English Baron: A Gothic Story* (London, 1780), preface. References are to this edition, hereafter *OEB*.

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Reeve inaugurates the now proverbial lineage of the Gothic genre—placing Walpole at its head and laying claim to the new literary pedigree—only to forsake the genealogy that she seems to sanction and fashion her work into exactly what Walpole means *Otranto* not to be: a plausible fiction. Swift generalizations about Gothic origins—even the most astute generalizations, such as "ambivalent self-parody ... characterizes the gothic from its genesis"—thus invariably come to a halt once applied to Reeve, the first to mythologize this genesis but also the first to rid the Gothic of its transgressive parody.[3] To resolve or at least circumvent this discrepancy, those of us who research the genre tend to sandwich references to *The Old English Baron* between lofty examinations of Walpole's *Otranto* and Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), making succinct yet sardonic remarks on its myriad idiosyncrasies, if not sidestepping it altogether, before marching on to elucidate the Gothic proper. Nonetheless, however much we deride or simply disregard the strange figure that this novel makes within the Gothic canon, we continue to acknowledge, albeit often involuntarily, the profound if not seminal contribution that Reeve herself makes to it. For those of us least likely to examine *The Old English Baron* in depth are also those most likely to echo the memorable litany of the Gothic family tree delineated in this preface, celebrating the progressive "rise" of the Gothic novel with the "once upon a time" tenor more suggestive of the storybook birth of heroines than the emergence of an aesthetic movement.[4] If for this reason alone, Reeve remains instrumental to the development of the Gothic genre as a whole, regardless of how little appreciated

3 Natalka Freeland, "Theft, Terror and Family Values: The Mysteries and Domesticities of *Udolpho*," in *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*, ed. Peter Buss and Andrew Stott (London: Macmillan, 1999), 145.

4 For the mythical stories of Gothic origins, see Anne Williams, "Gothic Fiction's Family Romances," in *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); for the so-called "rise" of the genre, see Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (New York: Routledge, 1995). David H. Richter's *Progress of Romance: Literary Historiography and the Gothic Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996), which contains little discussion of Reeve's own *Progress of Romance* despite the appropriation of the title, is fairly representative. Using Reeve's favourite analogy, that of the seed for literary influence, to omit her from the canon altogether, Richter argues that the "origins" of the Gothic novel "present an admirable clarity": "Beneath the paper-mâché machicolations of Strawberry Hill, the antiquarian and aesthete Horace Walpole ... created at white heat ... *The Castle of Otranto*," its seed having travelled "to Germany before being replanted into its native English soil" in the 1790s (1). Richter does acknowledge the intervening *The Old English Baron* but without affiliating that work (even nominally) with its more worldly Gothic cousins, demoting Reeve's self-identified "Gothic Story" to an "historical romance" (1).

she is as a Gothic novelist in her own right. Reeve not only promotes and popularizes the emerging Gothic canon, but she also initiates the still enduring research into its imaginary origins, research at times almost as fantastic, nostalgic, and prolific as the genre itself.

This strangely derivative, yet dismissive, approach to Reeve seems simply to compound once we build on her early genealogy of the genre to trace the progressive rise of the "female Gothic."[5] In searching for the covert—or, at least, unconscious—madwoman-in-the-attic penchant for Gothic subversion, we rarely pause to consider what a peculiar literary "mother" *The Old English Baron* would make for the voluminous *Mysteries of Udolpho*, much less any of Radcliffe's other "gynocentric" tomes.[6] Whereas *The Old English Baron* foregrounds a trio of leading male characters, all of whom Reeve glorifies unabashedly throughout the narrative, the vast majority of Radcliffe's novels pivot around a central heroine, if not two. Whereas Reeve transforms the chaotic, autocratic, and distinctly patriarchal setting of *Otranto* into a quiescent platform on which to stage the paternalistic philanthropy of the "Old English" barons of yore, Radcliffe not only embraces, but also enhances, the Gothic grandiosity that Walpole first licenses. Indeed, by foregrounding nihilistic male villains (otherwise known as "Byronic heroes") who take full advantage of, or simply capitulate to, their egregious power and privilege, Radcliffe aligns herself with Walpole to underscore the iniquitous carte blanche of paternalism that Reeve patently veils, if not purposely condones.

5 Aside from Gary Kelly's anthology *Varieties of Female Gothic* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001), which offers a comprehensive introduction to women Gothic novelists, the most recent accounts of the "female Gothic" can be found in E.J. Clery, *Women's Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2000) and Diane Long Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998). Even though *The Progress of Romance* and its test case—*The Old English Baron*—are crucial instances of the "professionalization of gender," Reeve is only briefly alluded to in the latter, likely because she falls so conspicuously outside of the "female Gothic" paradigm: "the same impulse and originating fantasy" drives *The Old English Baron* as other "rudimentary," "stock" Gothic novels by women, in which "women and their allies ('castrated,' wounded men) rise up and create a new bourgeois world free from the corrupt trappings of the past" (Hoeveler, 56). No such women exist in this novel, however, where, if anything, we find a "new bourgeois world" appropriating the *uncorrupted* aristocratic "trappings of the past."

6 See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), a seminal work of feminist criticism, in which the "female Gothic" is a key concern, if not the key impetus. Mary Daly's term "gynocentric," or women-centred, refers to texts that foster autonomy for women by operating without reference to or dependence upon patriarchal institutions. Daly, *Gyn/ecology, the Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon, 1978).

Women or no, these reputed female Gothicists differ as much from each other as either of the two differs from the male Gothicist Walpole, whose disregard for the conventions of masculinity has been legendary, if not infamous, since the eighteenth century.[7]

Men and women do not automatically position themselves on opposite sides of the gender divide when it comes to their ideological allegiances. Yet despite the conspicuous differences between Reeve and Radcliffe, we still presume that they operate in clear concert with the "female Gothic," or at least in direct opposition to the "male Gothic," if not in strict solidarity with each other.[8] Thus, more often than not, the few scholars who actually do examine Reeve with attention—namely, feminists—tend to investigate *The Old English Baron* only insofar as it clarifies or complicates the works of Radcliffe or other female Gothicists retroactively. With such an anachronistic purview, Reeve's polemic treatment of Walpole's *Otranto*, as well as her contribution to the Gothic genre as a whole, can be easily misconstrued. Indeed, Reeve's contentious *mêlée* with a male predecessor can even begin to appear to be precisely what it is not: a proto-feminist intervention in the nascent Gothic canon, an intervention that ensuing heiresses of the female Gothic will revive and reinforce in a long line of succession. The supposition that gender predetermines genre is, in fact, so ubiquitous in Gothic scholarship that critics who would otherwise be little swayed by the formulaic encodings of gender and genre remain unwilling to abandon the paradigm alto-

7 See William Guthrie, *A Reply to the Counter Address* (1764), an *ad hominem* attack indicting Walpole of hermaphroditism, homosexuality, and animality, in *A Collection of Scarce and Interesting Tracts, Written by Persons of Eminence; Upon the Most Important, Political and Commercial Subjects*, 4 vols. (London, 1787–88), 1:343–65. For accounts of Walpole's homoeroticism and the homophobic reactions to it, see Timothy Mowl, *Horace Walpole: The Great Outsider* (London: Murray, 1996); Jill Campbell, "'I Am No Giant': Horace Walpole, Heterosexual Incest, and Love among Men," *The Eighteenth-Century* 39:3 (1998), 238–60; and George E. Haggerty, "Walpoliana," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34:2 (2001), 227–49.

8 Even critics otherwise attentive to conservative women writers, such as Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) or Eleanor Ty, *Empowering the Feminine: The Narratives of Mary Robinson, Jane West, and Amelia Opie, 1796–1812* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), tend to misinterpret Reeve by taking for granted her similarity to Radcliffe. Following J.M.S. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England: 1770–1800* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961)—who offers the rather Sadean proviso "Miss Reeve had some ambition, though she kept it well chastised" (117)—Ty places Reeve with Radcliffe in the "moderate" section of the feminist spectrum (Ty, 10), while Butler argues that Reeve's conservatism is simply a feint permitting her to write in an "individualistic, libertarian, unorthodox, anti-social" genre (Butler, 30). Clery echoes Butler's argument, albeit with more humour: "A woman wishing to publish fiction in a supernatural vein needed to be prepared to negotiate." Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 106.

gether. One critic even goes so far as to classify Reeve's *The Old English Baron* as a male Gothic rather than as a female Gothic, offering a frank and refreshing assessment of the novel, albeit one that does surprisingly little to obviate the paradox.[9] For the very qualities that this scholar attributes to the male Gothic canon—"the transgression of social taboos by an excessive male will" and "the imagination's battle against religion, law, [and] contingency"—are precisely those qualities that Reeve admonishes, quite categorically, in Walpole's *Otranto*.[10] In short, it seems that even the most tolerant "female Gothic" approach fails to accommodate *The Old English Baron* in the canon. The more charitable that methodological lens, the more hermaphroditic Reeve ultimately appears.

Gothic scholarship may have taken a sharp turn recently, but the myopic consideration of women Gothic novelists has not. Where once we explored the labyrinthine convolutions of a single ego (coded female) in the throes of Gothic violence if not transgression (coded male), the Gothic foundations of the nation and the Gothic fantasies about those foundations have come to assume a principal position in the critical spotlight. Several excellent books have been published lately surveying the cultural contexts of *The Old English Baron*, some even demonstrating the "active interest" that Reeve takes in the political allegorization of history.[11] Nevertheless, lingering assumptions about gender still haunt the ways in which we view the Gothic, for better or worse. The tendency to refer to *The Old English Baron* by its initial title *The Champion of Virtue*, as if only the original intentions in publishing this novel can bespeak its overriding import throughout time, not those which have been informed by, and ruffled by, the messy contingencies of history, is itself indicative of the still residual habit of depoliticizing the works of women writers, except of course as they pertain to gender, and thence overlooking the ideological investments of the genre as a whole. Here, as elsewhere, conjectures about gender not only trump the conceptualization of class, and the socio-political more generally, but predetermine it. For, despite evi-

9 Alison Milbank, "Female Gothic," in *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, ed. Mary Mulvey-Roberts (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 54.

10 Milbank, 54.

11 Toni Wein, *British Identities, Heroic Nationalisms, and the Gothic Novel, 1764–1824* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 73. The editors of two new editions of the novel likewise offer contextualized analyses. See *The Old English Baron and Castle of Otranto*, ed. Laura L. Runge (Glen Allen: College Publishing, 2002) and "Enlightenment Gothic and Terror Gothic," vol. 1, *Varieties of Female Gothic*, ed. Kelly.

dence to the contrary, Reeve's project continues to be construed as nonconformist, meritocratic, and feminist,[12] if only in contrast to the patriarchal and/or aristocratic disposition erroneously ascribed to Walpole.[13]

As James Watt has lately argued, *The Old English Baron* offers a prime example of the "loyalist Gothic," upholding a "transparently loyalist agenda" and "complicat[ing] the map" of Gothic fiction with the "diverse affiliations of the genre."[14] However, if Reeve, as well as the heirs of her historical Gothic (Edgeworth, Scott, Godwin, Dickens, and others), appears at times so un-Gothic as to seem "loyalist," she may in reality belong to the canon qua canon, not simply a conservative subset of a typically counter-canon genre at all. And if Reeve

12 I primarily refer to *British Identities*, which offers divergent but nonetheless plausible interpretations of much of what will be addressed in this article. Following Hoeveler, Wein argues that the "ideological codes of knight-errantry" serve to "buffer" and "screen" the conflicts of the aristocracy (90). Yet even though Reeve exploits this ideology to a degree then unknown in a woman novelist, Wein does not view Reeve as actively participating in that ideology, or even as unwittingly being complicit with it, but merely as relaying the class ambivalence of the culture at large (90). At one point, Wein deflects her own intriguing discovery about feudal "champions," mercenary "proxy fighters" for the nobility, whose "materialistic disregard of true equity" makes the "original title, *The Champion of Virtue*, an oxymoron" (89). Where Wein sees inadvertent confusion and conflict, I see a deliberate obfuscation of hypocrisy and reality alike. By concealing the vested interests that the gentry and aristocracy each have in the "championship of virtue," Reeve maintains the fiction of a chivalric, disinterested upper-class magnanimity prevailing in legend if not in fact. Wein further claims that Reeve is "overtly feminist," noting that she substitutes a "colonialist thrust" for the "nuclearization of the nuclear family" and incorporates "through marriage geographically, politically, and socially discrete groups" (18, 81). As will become clear, this "colonialist" redeployment of the kinship system is simply a way to put a gentler (more feminine) face on capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy itself, all of which become increasingly entrenched by the end of the century.

13 Most noteworthy is Thomas Babington Macaulay's scurrilous character sketch, a diatribe against Walpole's reputed dilettantism. Macaulay, *Historical Essays of Thomas Babington Macaulay*, ed. George A. Watrous (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1901), 109–60. Although more a case study in homophobic projection than a convincing critique of aristocratic elitism, it still informs much of what is published on Walpole, from cultural histories of the eighteenth century to the large body of Gothic scholarship informed by them. Compare John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Morris R. Brownell, *The Prime Minister of Taste: A Portrait of Horace Walpole* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); and Barbara Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). Brewer, for example, quite cavalierly claims that Walpole's "exquisite taste was matched only by his exquisite snobbery," an assertion quite in keeping with Macaulay's review but not borne out by the correspondence itself, especially following the early "Quadruple Alliance" volumes (Brewer, 144–45).

14 James Watt, *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre, and Cultural Conflict, 1764–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 44. Although he slightly overstresses the conservatism of the Gothic in this corrective of earlier scholarship, Watt offers a compelling interpretation of *The Old English Baron*.

represents, in effect, the canon itself, and not simply an odd Gothic quirk to add to it, then the female Gothic, a genre hitherto routinely assailed as the scandalous, if somewhat seductive, mother of romantic poetry, may instead emerge as the long-lost, though no doubt under-esteemed, sibling of the realist novel. Even so, the nagging problem persists of how to classify the "female Gothic," that notoriously skittish generic marker. Why, we might ask, is the fabled origin of the female Gothic—a literary genealogy so long celebrated for its subversive potential—clearly a-feminist, if not un-feminist, and so often anything but Gothic? In the end Reeve appears an anomaly not only in relation to the great Gothic grandsire Walpole, but also in relation to the preponderance of women Gothicists who soon succeed her.

With the staunch renunciation of the extravagant and violent "machinery" of *Otranto*, Reeve neither moves away from the masculine horror tradition nor engenders a female Gothic tradition. Instead, Reeve offers a quite savvy reconstruction of the "prerogatives of masculine power" that Walpole seeks to undermine.[15] By harking back to an era "when the sons of Britain were hardy, manly, and virtuous, and [its] daughters modest, delicate, and chaste," Reeve attempts to devise a future in which strict medieval hierarchies—and especially those of gender—preserve the customary charm, ritual reinforcement, and resounding functionality of that much exalted but patently exploitive era, despite the secularism and commercialism that make the rationalization for such stratifications rapidly obsolete.[16] Reeve's feudal re-engineering of past and present alike thus represents a deliberate attempt to reinstate aristocratic ideology, annex its cultural cachet to a non-titled, yet conspicuously wealthy, upper middle class, and thereby disguise, or at least deflect, the patent incongruity between that class's posture of disinterested nobility and the materialism that sustains it, especially considering the successful parody of aristocratic ideology, and of the aristocracy itself, in Walpole's *Otranto*. This interest in beautifying the crude reality of power also explains why, notwithstanding her apparent departure from the claptrap of the Gothic, Reeve only further exasperates its contradictions, modifying and redeploying the supernatural rather than eradicating it altogether. A novel which can, like a reversed philosopher's stone, convert the uncompensated labour of the

15 Haggerty, "Walpoliana," 243.

16 Reeve, *Plans of Education; with Remarks on the Systems of Other Writers* (London, 1792), 59. References are to this edition, hereafter *PE*.

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peasantry into the fit reward of spirited knight errantry is no less far-fetched than one which indulges in the supernatural to mock those metaphysics, detailing the uncanny tribulations of a medieval castle, imploding from the strain of its disavowed and discordant histories. Where Walpole flaunts the faultlines, Reeve doublespeaks the divine to shoo them away.

As with Linda Colley's *Britons: Forging the Nation*, wherein the British wonder "if they had overstretched themselves, made nervous and insecure by their colossal new dimensions," *The Castle of Otranto* reads like a global pregnancy gone astray.[17] Walpole's central castle, an emblem of the implacable feudal hubris of the aristocracy, collapses as the gigantic but disjointed body parts of the ghost of Alfonso, the rightful owner, engulf, usurp, and repossess the estate. Walpole eventually restores Otranto to a lawful, humanly proportioned heir, but the unmistakably surreal and sensationalistic devices that he uses to effect that restoration prove the futility of consolidating the alienated parts of the "body politic" into an organic patriarchal community. Walpole's chief prophecy, that the "Castle and Lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it," thus foregrounds the uncertainty of "real" ownership, underscoring the built-in, self-replicating largess of materiality and maternity while also mocking the symbolic, legislative manoeuvres that appropriate or aggrandize them retroactively.[18] Most importantly, in detailing the Machiavellian attempts of Manfred to sire a male heir, even if it means raping the fiancée of his lately deceased son, proclaiming relations with his wife incestuous, and reordering the generations so perversely as to confound paternity and patrilineage alike, Walpole puts stark emphasis on the violent detours that the homosocial order must take through the bodies of women. In defamiliarizing the setting spatially (Italy) and temporally (the Middle Ages), Walpole seems to demarcate this violence only to dislodge its contemporary import. Once Walpole acknowledges authorship of *Otranto*, however, that purposely contrived protective

17 Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 101.

18 Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto and The Mysterious Mother*, ed. Frederick S. Frank (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2003), 73.

screen begins to accomplish the reverse: disconcerting the defensive mechanisms of readers in first provoking and then frustrating their tendency to displace blame onto others and disavow their own complicity. To further ensure that his contemporaries can no longer justifiably, or even satisfactorily, exempt themselves from culpability, Walpole draws particular attention to that Gothic sleight of hand so inextricable from the Enlightenment project itself. Namely, the Manfred-esque delusion of grandeur whereby fertile lands and bodies, through acts of will or law alone, become everlasting "living dead" dominions and wives.

Despite the nod to the Gothic in its subtitle and preface, *The Old English Baron* remains more a travesty of Walpole's Gothic novel, and a pre-emptive strike against its imitators, than any kind of tribute to the genre as a whole. At odds with just about everything that sets *Otranto* apart from other novels (and, thus, in keeping with her familial logic, the Gothic from other genres), Reeve nonetheless tries to pass off her unseasonably didactic romance in the guise of a charmingly refurbished Walpolean antique, summoning the trendy name and far-away era of Walpole's "Gothic Story" but sanitizing the traits with which he distinguishes each. Well-versed in the sly psychology of the nursery—the epigraph to *Plans for Education* (1792) reads, "Train up a Child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it"—Reeve clothes this remonstrance in a seeming compliment, proffering her antidote in the very poison that its admirers would seek. Then to complete the *coup d'état*, Reeve resurrects the Johnsonian tradition of virtue-bound verisimilitude (what George E. Haggerty calls "genteel, moralistic novelizing"), arguing that the "business of Romance [is] to direct [the attention] to some useful, or at least innocent, end."[19] All of this transpires as if a strict economy of reward and retribution can be the true test of literary innovation, not the glib vestige of an institution that Walpole deliberately sets out to revamp.

The vast and frequently traced stylistic differences between Reeve and Walpole represent more than just cliquish disputes over literary form or personal deviations in taste. Visions for the future cannot help but stake themselves on reconstructions of the past, and Walpole's unsteady, relativistic evocations of the feudal era, not the vagaries of the retrospect itself, are what Reeve chiefly means to counteract.

19 Haggerty, *Gothic Fiction/Gothic Form* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 21; Reeve, *Progress of Romance*, 2 vols., ed. Esther Mohr McGill (New York: Facsimile Text Society, 1930), 1:iv. References are to this edition, hereafter *PR*.

Indeed, if Naomi Schor is correct in identifying fetishism as a distinctly feminist mode of authorial irony, one by which the "uncanny doubling of the fetish ... works to undermine the uniqueness of the phallus and to underline its infinite substitutability," then Walpole, not Reeve, would be the better feminist.[20] With *Otranto*, Walpole turns the phallic simulacrum of the heroic past, that oft-repeated trope of the glorious days of yesteryear, into a wayward fetish, an exchangeable, dismemberable medley of part objects that only supernaturally or theatrically bear display together. Not surprisingly, Reeve takes particular exception to Walpole's hyperreal literary devices—the "sword so large as to require a hundred men to lift it," the "helmet that by its own weight forces a passage through a court-yard," and the "picture that walks out of its own frame"—since these literalized hyperboles are what most effectively burlesque the props and pageantry of patriarchal culture (*OEB*, vi). Each caricatures the inflated, and at times even histrionic, theatrics that patriarchy must itself deploy to instil its authority, whether via conquest (the unwieldy, oversized sword), property (the territorial expanse of the castle), or genealogy (the epic portraiture of ancestors and progenitors). Beautifying, and thereby naturalizing, these patriarchal trappings and sleights of hand is in reality the mainstay of Reeve's aesthetic practice. By shoring up the allegedly benign institution of paternalism, Reeve can render the exorbitant appropriations of power vital to modernity—colonialism, capitalism, and classism— innocuous, if only in appearance.

During the period in which *The Old English Baron* is set, England secures, due to its aggressive foreign policy, a long-awaited hiatus in the civil wars as well as an absolute sovereignty over a sizeable portion of France. These historical events provide a much-needed precedent for the paternalistic, yet surrogate and synthetic, British protection that the American Revolution puts into question, particularly during the years 1777–80, when this novel is first published and read. Opening the narrative in the "minority of Henry the Sixth, when the renowned John Duke of Bedford was the Regent of France, and Humphrey the good Duke of Gloucester ... Protector of England," Reeve advertises her anachronism from the outset: counting time not according to the genealogical clock of kings but according to the imperial dominion of the "renowned," "good" ministers supervising territories both inside and outside a then quite nebulous nation

20 Naomi Schor, *Bad Objects: Essays Popular and Unpopular* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 123.

(*OEB*, 2). Where David Hume describes this reign as witnessing the ascendancy of "those mighty barons," more "sovereign than the king himself," who vie to surpass each other in "all quarrels, iniquities, extortions, murders, robberies, and other crimes," Reeve depicts this reign as abounding with munificent barons, each fostering civil society and willingly forsaking possessions on the slightest hint of their illegitimacy.[21] Similarly, where nearly all of the characters in *Otranto* possess the names of emperors—Manfred (King of Sicily), his son Conrad (Conrad III, Holy Roman Emperor), his daughter Matilda (the "Empress," a veritable yet rarely discussed Queen of England),[22] his wife Hippolita (Queen of the Amazons), and the wife he hopes will replace her, Isabella (Queen of Spain, patroness of Columbus)—Reeve's characters, as the initial title *The Champion of Virtue* suggests, flaunt their protection and patronage, carefully avoiding any indication of extravagant conquest or tyrannical rule. Much like Henry VI, the protagonist Edmund acquires his education and fortune from two guardians; nevertheless, unlike that king and, above all, unlike Walpole's Manfred, Edmund obtains and eventually bequeaths this legacy with relatively little controversy or antagonism, requiring just a perfunctory act of violence—a duel fought not by him, but in his name—to safeguard his ancestral demesne for perpetuity.

As Susan Stewart has shown, nostalgia only exacerbates the disappointments that it aims to console, conjuring a simulacrum of the past that "never existed except as narrative" and thence threatening at any moment to expose that past as a "felt lack," a synthetic reconstruction.[23] The venerable historical context that Reeve summons to sustain this paternalistic illusion therefore serves just as well to expose its constructedness, with the indefinite present of the pubescent monarch's reign and the surrogate reign of his two guardian uncles especially bearing out the problematic nostalgia of the text. According to Hume, Henry VI scarcely manages even to reach maturity: "Of the most ... simple manners but of the most slender capacity: he was fitted, both by the softness of his temper, and the weakness of his understanding, to be perpetually governed by those who surrounded

21 David Hume, *History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1854), 2:331, 428.

22 The declared successor of Henry I, Matilda reigns until Stephen of Blois attempts to usurp her throne; she then transfers the crown to her son, Henry of Anjou, who becomes Henry II in 1153.

23 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), 23.

him; and it was easy to foresee, that his reign would prove a perpetual minority."[24] After the death of the Duke of Bedford, an event Reeve mourns as an "irreparable loss" to the "English nation," the protector who rules by ruling Henry is his wife, Margaret of Anjou (*OEB*, 33). As Hume concedes reluctantly, this queen possesses a "masculine, courageous spirit," an "enterprizing temper," and a "solidity as well as a vivacity of understanding"—facts that harmonize little with the few, entirely passive, often dying or already dead, and altogether ghostly women in *The Old English Baron*.[25] Instead of an intrepid wife or mother, Reeve extols the chivalric and charitable patrons: the knight Sir Philip, the undaunted "champion of virtue" who duels in lieu of Edmund, and the Baron Fitz-Owen, a gracious squire who grants Edmund sanctuary as a servant in the Lovel castle.

Reeve structures her novel by the Freudian family romance in its purest form: Edmund "Twyford," the legitimate offspring of the murdered Lord Lovel, is raised by the tenants of his own estate, only to be at last restored to his vast possessions and aristocratic rank.[26] In order to render the fairy-tale structure of this narrative plausible, and Edmund's progression from serfdom to nobility a natural evolution rather than an unseemly usurpation or otherwise violent revolution, Reeve deflects attention from the upstart autocrat Manfred as well as his perverse privilege by introducing a set of patrons who vie to adopt Edmund even before his noble birth is revealed. The obligatory, but transgressive, deposition of the original patriarch (the noble Lord Lovel) and instantiation of the new generation (the relatives of the non-propertied, bourgeois, yet inexplicably knighted Fitz-Owen) each take place during the obscurity of the primal past. As a result, while the repentant murderer waits in the wings for his final cue and ultimate punishment, the ostensibly guiltless Fitz-Owen clan enjoys, unchal-

24 Hume, 2:418–19.

25 Hume, 2:418–19.

26 The Freudian concept of the family romance profoundly influences Gothic scholarship, perhaps even as much as Freud himself was once influenced by Gothic fiction. Freud argues that children invent new parents for themselves—parents more refined than the real-world, "adopted" caretakers familiar to them—in order to come to terms with the harsh contradictions of family life and, by analogy, life itself. One of his premises is that the disappointment we experience in our families, particularly the disappointment caused by our fathers, parallels that which we experience, consciously or unconsciously, in the state. Freud therefore models his theory of nationalism on the family romance, contending that, like children, nations concoct fantastic, wish-fulfilling genealogies to obscure the heterogeneity of their origins and to enforce the bonds of affiliation (or disaffiliation) resulting from that presumed homogeneity. See Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Katherine Jones (New York: Vintage, 1959).

lenged and entire, the usurped estate. Unlike most Gothic novels, in which dreams typically portend extreme danger, disruption, or loss, the dreams in Reeve's novel simply serve to predict the class mobility of the principal players. Ghosts, such as Edmund's father, enter the narrative not to frighten but to enrich the few mortals lucky enough to discern their presence; and demons, such as the wicked Fitz-Owen kinsmen, wreak havoc solely in the material realm, their main ambition to sabotage the ever-so-worldly dispensations from heaven.

E.J. Clery quite accurately describes this novel as a "rewriting of *Otranto* as *Pamela* in fancy-dress with a spice of the paranormal, an illustrative conduct-book for the proper correlation of wealth and virtue"; however, with a feudal lord dominating its title and a trifecta of male protagonists at its core, *The Old English Baron* is, if anything, a masculine *bildungsroman*—a distinctly paternal fiction with a distinctly paternal "looking-glass truth" far removed from the Cinderella antics of *Pamela*.[27] Whereas the prophecy in *Otranto* foregrounds the uncertainty of patrilineage, severing the tacit correlation between legitimate and inherited grandeur, Reeve's prophetic refrain—"Providence will in its own time vindicate its ways to man"— forestalls, if not altogether forbids, misgivings about the unequal distribution of property, encouraging passive and patient acquiescence in divine revelation (*OEB*, 46). Moreover, unlike Walpole, who allows his protagonists (and his readers) only a tenuous rapport between their over-demanding present and its historical antecedents, Reeve takes great pains to prove, through feudal law, forensic science, and divine intervention alike, Edmund's hereditary title to the Lovel estate, even granting his future father-in-law, the Baron Fitz-Owen, a vicarious claim to that estate en route.[28] Indeed, the narrative that Reeve so precariously hinges upon the figurehead reign of Henry VI, the first and last grandfather-to-father, father-to-son succession in many generations, is the very narrative of organic paternalism that Walpole sets out to subvert in *Otranto* and that Edmund Burke resuscitates to fortify

27 Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 86, 84.

28 The phallocentricism that so many critics attribute to *The Castle of Otranto* (simply due to its male authorship) would be better ascribed to *The Old English Baron*. As to how there can be any legitimate patrilineal inheritance of a castle like Otranto, which so compulsively manufactures and advertises its own marvels, such critics never inform us. In contrast to Reeve's protagonist, the sole offspring of Lord and Lady Lovel, Walpole's protagonist derives from a series of suspicious marriages: that between the noble Lord Alfonso and the non-noble Victoria and that between a Roman Catholic priest and the unnamed female heir to Alfonso's fortunes.

British nationalism in the face of the French Revolution. Where Walpole concludes with Manfred declaring, "I would draw a veil over my ancestor's crimes—but it is in vain," from the start Reeve embraces Manfred's wilful delusion, claiming that romance "throws a veil over the blemishes" of history, which "alas, too often [furnishes] a melancholy retrospect" (*OEB*, v).[29] The climactic finale of Reeve's novel is thus nothing less than an homage to paternity: "Sweet is the remembrance of the virtuous, and happy descendents of such a father! they will think on him and emulate his virtues; they will remember him, and be ashamed to degenerate from their ancestor" (*OEB*, 232).

Not only is this glorified representation of the Middle Ages at odds with the historical records about that era, which were widely available and widely read in the eighteenth century, but also the unqualified application of the family romance makes the tale proceed in direct contradiction to the generally held political philosophy of the time. As the conventional wisdom would have it, democratic and monarchal tendencies effectively balance each other out, providing an identifiable, authoritative father figure in the king while nonetheless safeguarding the political voice of his many "sons." Reeve sets out to reinvigorate the image of the father if only in retrospect, but the fraternal, egalitarian virtues that she deploys to justify his exalted position are incommensurate with the baronial, patriarchal status that he actually commands. In fact, notwithstanding the succession of happy coincidences that drive the plot of *The Old English Baron*, this paternalistic ideal remains impracticable. For it is entirely unclear to whom the protagonists (and, by analogy, the readers themselves) offer their devotional tribute at the conclusion of the novel, let alone which of the many male characters Reeve means to distinguish as the "old English baron" of the title. The rivalries between the brothers consume the majority of the diegesis, and the series of father figures (Sir Philip, the Baron, the Roman Catholic Father Oswald, and the Scottish judges Lords Clifford and Graham) are fathers merely by proxy to the protagonist. Walter Scott thus complains, "if Fitzowen

29 Walpole, *Castle*, 162. With a no less artfully concocted vision of organic paternity, Burke claims, "By adhering ... to our forefathers, we are guided not by the superstition of antiquarians, but by the spirit of philosophic analogy," endowing our political "frame [with] the image of a relation of blood," uniting the "constitution of our country with our dearest domestic ties," and treasuring at once "our state, our hearths, our sepulchers, and our altars." Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (New York: Penguin, 1986), 120.

[*sic*] be considered as *The Old English Baron*, we do not see wherefore a character, passive in himself from beginning to end, and only acted upon by others, should be selected to give a name to the story."[30]

The curious modification of the title from the apposite *Champion of Virtue* to the highly equivocal *The Old English Baron* is also far from accidental.[31] Reeve employs the chronotope of the family romance in such a way that two incompatible types of familial structures contend for the all-powerful yet ultra-compassionate position vacated by the dead and by default exalted father. The first is a veritable horde of male children: the sons, adopted sons, and distant cousins who vie for the praise and patronage of the in-house patriarch, the Baron Fitz-Owen. The second is the roaming, militant band of feudal men, epitomized by Sir Philip Harclay, who returns to England to set up house with his fellow veterans from the crusades. Much like the original Lord Lovel, whose heirs he unwittingly displaces, Baron Fitz-Owen spends his time in a blissful plentitude made possible by the other, more militant, familial structure, while throughout remaining uncontaminated by its violence. Accordingly, after the émigré Sir Philip re-establishes his household in "his native country" only to find that his "mother and sister were dead, and his estates sequestered," he promptly travels west to rekindle his "strict friendship" with Lord Lovel, there discovering how suitably and seamlessly the Baron supplies that departed Lord's place (*OEB*, 1, 3, 4). Almost as if he is a fairy godmother, Sir Philip begins to transform the universe to accord with the unspoken wishes of the main characters: not just restoring the Lovel estate to the worthy protege Edmund, but also recompensing the Baron quite handsomely for the obligatory surrender of that estate to his miraculously ennobled servant. By the conclusion of the novel, Sir Philip becomes so enchanted with the Fitz-Owens that he gives his own estate, the long-estranged Harclay family seat, to the Baron as a gift, a bequest much in excess of the property that the Baron leases from the Lovels and never truly sacrifices in the first place. These fortuitous changes in venue also little curtail the chronic dispossession left in the Baron's wake: the presumptive but strangely homeless "old English baron" simply continues to inhabit the ancestral lands of others, apparently as blamelessly, while the philanthropic knight relocates to another castle. From beginning to end, however,

30 Walter Scott, *Biographical Memoirs of Eminent Novelists, and Other Distinguished Persons* (Freeport: Books for Libraries, 1972), 1:326.

31 See n12 above.

when the Fitz-Owen daughter becomes a proper wife to Edmund and thereby becomes, although a lifelong inhabitant of the Lovel castle, its new mistress, the drive of the narrative is less to reunite these wayward men with their respective women and properties than to reunite these incongruous masculine figures—one wealthy, one landed; one worldly, one reclusive—with each other through those women and those properties.

With the uncritical endorsement of the allegedly sacrosanct patriarchal ethos of honour and chivalric protection, Reeve obscures the violent means by which those patriarchal trappings are produced. *The Old English Baron* thus shares the same structural concern as *Otranto*: how to confound the genealogies of the real and usurped heirs of a castle; but Reeve downplays the aggression of that displacement by concentrating on Edmund's charitable adoption within the Fitz-Owen family rather than that family's expedient appropriation of his hereditary estate. Moreover, even though the villain in *The Old English Baron* commits essentially the same offences as the villains in *Otranto*—murdering the original patriarch and coercing the wife to marry the usurper in his stead—it actually is Reeve herself who fulfils the chief objective of that criminal behaviour: implanting the non-propertied Fitz-Owen family into the landed estate of Lovel via an over-determined and highly contrived marriage of convenience. Reeve, of course, has the authorial prerogative to evoke companionate love rather than a coerced sexual contract, but she does even that half-heartedly through a loosely sketched bride (the childish "fair Emma"), who enters the narrative only to fall swiftly in love, claim Edmund as her groom, and thence secure by proxy the aristocratic pretensions of the Fitz-Owens as well as their uninterrupted occupancy of the Lovel castle (*OEB*, 94). Nonetheless, the Fitz-Owen family takes possession of Edmund's property so far in advance of his marrying, or even meeting, Emma that the wedding which ultimately sanctifies her affiliation with the Lovels appears a retroactive formality at best, especially since the homosocial bonds between the men are so highly cathected as to make conjugal love seem superfluous, if not redundant, by comparison anyway.[32] Uninspired and undeveloped as

32 Haggerty likewise argues that Reeve "attempts to create some love interest around the figure of Lady Emma, but her effort is perfunctory": "The few scenes between Emma and Edmund, are stilted [with] Emma's demands and disappointments ... secondary to the display of male affection." Haggerty, *Unnatural Affections: Women and Fiction in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 57.

it may be, this digression into sentiment is indispensable to the narrative, not only to provide closure but to fulfil the family romance more generally. Metonymic relationships such as matrimony and adoption— genealogies, that is, which depend on semblance and supplement rather than substance—together engineer the new upper-class imago, a fabulous ego ideal equipped with the hereditary clout of the aristocracy yet underwritten by the surfeit affluence of the bourgeoisie.

Once married, Edmund sires no less than five sons, each named in honour of the primary male protagonists, but none harking back to the violent origins from which they, their progenitors, and their very names spring. The firstborn, "Arthur," is named after the maternal grandfather, the Baron Fitz-Owen; the second is named after Sir Philip, the surrogate grandfather whose acquisition of wealth abroad prevents his direct affiliation with the child upon whom he bestows his fortune. The third son is named in honour of the Baron's son "William," and that son's homosocial "strict friendship" with Edmund, while the fourth, "Edmund," receives the most paternal nomination, although only after the preceding son, William Jr, unites the hitherto discordant masculinities within a single generation. To complete the circle, the fifth son, "Owen," is named yet again in honour of the maternal grandfather, as if to remind us that the Baron Fitz-Owen (whose surname means literally "son of Owen," lest his paternity might also be in doubt) represents the definitive origin of the Lovel family, even more than Sir Philip, Lord Lovel, or Edmund himself. This familial genealogy likewise memorializes English history as a whole, opening with the glorious King Arthur and thence continuing with the mercantile (Protestant) King William of Orange instead of the sanguine (Catholic) King Philip of Spain. All in all, *The Old English Baron* is a national allegory as much as a domestic fiction, with its amorphous title character, the "Old English Baron," conjuring a fabulous, future-perfect ideal: an incongruous blend of a warrior who commits no war and a worldly man who travels the world over without venturing beyond his estate or his marriage.

Military service to (or, to be more accurate, armed resistance against) the king principally characterized the barons of the Middle Ages, not aristocratic status. As the lowest but most bellicose rung of the nobility, the barons provide an ideal precedent for the half-bourgeois, half-noble protagonists of *The Old English Baron*, who

function as knights-errant and lords of the manor alike, notwithstanding their dubious foothold in the aristocracy. With the Magna Carta, the barons contract for both subservience and freedom: subservience within the national and global territories acknowledged to be (or to become) the king's, and freedom within the local territories acknowledged to be (at last) their own. Even when this balance of power was precarious—for once combined, these propertied parts could, and often did, outweigh the fictitious national whole that they comprised— the barons would supply their sons and servants to combat the adversaries of the king abroad. Not unlike the barons of old, the increasingly landed gentry of the eighteenth century transport their sons, tenants, and servants (often forcibly) abroad to fight the recurrent wars in Germany and America, campaigns widely seen as upholding the regal honour of King George alone. Moreover, not unlike the barons of old, this newly prominent class begins to expect its recompense: to scale the ranks of the colonial infrastructures overseas and to secure homage within the modernized "fiefs" of Britain itself.

Sir Philip is just as representative of the middle class as his counterpart the Baron, if not more so, yet he is by far the more problematic of the two idealized patriarchs because of the true-to-life violence of his militant heroism. The reputed author of portions of *The Old English Baron*, Sir Philip does not recount the foreign travels or fantastic adventures that might enliven the prototypical knight's tale. Rather than detailing his armed expeditions into France or Turkey, events that would constitute a longer and likely far more interesting temporal expanse to say the least, Sir Philip documents his leisurely excursion through the English countryside, focusing particularly on the myriad families that he espies in this native yet still largely unfamiliar country. True to the conventions of the daydream, Sir Philip celebrates his homecoming twice—once before and once following his encounter with the Baron—with the second arrival rescripting, and effectually nullifying, the unwelcome realities of the first. Sir Philip therefore lands in "safety at home" not after his death-defying feats in the crusades, but after a convivial visit with the Fitz-Owens and, most importantly, after he garners a "family" of servants who, in lieu of a deceased mother and sister, "rejoiced at his return" (*OEB*, 25). Even when finally settled into his own castle, Sir Philip continues to reminisce about the private affairs of the Fitz-Owens rather than

the martial engagements to which he dedicated the bulk of his life: "He reflected frequently upon every thing that had befallen him in his late journey to the west; and, at his leisure, took down all the particulars in writing. *Here follows an interval of four years, as by the manuscript; and this omission seems intended by the Writer*" (*OEB*, 25).

After Sir Philip's pleasant forays into homespun England supplant the likely traumatic recollections persisting from wars abroad, the narrative ceases. There is no need to speak, or read, or write once Sir Philip returns to his homeland and charitably dispenses with his vast fortune, just as before there was no need to interact, when the rightful Lord Lovel comes of age, inherits his father's estate, and promptly discontinues his correspondence with Sir Philip, the future champion of his disinherited son. Above all, there is no need to communicate once Edmund succeeds in perpetuating all the names and all the estates of these honourable patriarchs into grandiose Old Testament futurity. Any unnecessary contact with the chivalric knight Sir Philip, and especially any undue acknowledgment of his inexplicable patronage of the Fitz-Owen family, would expose the unspoken yet inexorable demand for an auxiliary source of wealth, a demand springing from generations past and present, from the aristocracy and gentry, and from the English nation itself.

This disjointed, truncated narrative signals much more than a negation or domestication of epic violence on the part of a woman novelist; it also serves as a sign of the utter silencing of Sir Philip himself. However convenient as an icon of gallantry beyond the receding yet amplifying lens of national perception, Sir Philip poses a threat to the real fathers and real families safely ensconced within the fabulous domestic interior of England proper. In fact, much like the women who are confined, with such incessant repetition, into the dilapidated castles or subterranean caverns of the later Gothic canon, Sir Philip serves as a striking, though disavowed, reminder of the lack of equity that sustains the allegedly free circulation of Protestant goods and services. Whether in terms of land, labour, or bodies, the carefully consolidated patrilineal inheritance requires that individuals forfeit their private interest on behalf of the artificially bolstered name and estate, and with his liquid capital dedicated to whichever of the happy couples mate at the end of the narrative, Sir Philip can have neither a mother nor a sister, and especially not a wife or an heir. Even though he embodies the very signifier through which

colonial wealth is sublated into paternal charity and beneficent protection, Sir Philip must remain as quiet and captive as a monk within his distant mansion, surrounded by veterans, eunuchs, and servants. That is, until Edmund and the Baron can safely appropriate his fortune, offering Sir Philip in return a grand but ghostly apotheosis in the newly subsidized Lovel (née Fitz-Owen) family tree.

When Edmund pursues military adventures abroad in glorious imitation of his benefactor Sir Philip, the tale likewise breaks off at multiple points, and the narrator abandons any semblance of diegetic continuity. For Reeve, family history is national history, and the traumas within one directly mime the traumas within the other. The original Lord Lovel attains his dying father's title in harmonious conjunction with his own majority and marriage, yet he is just as discordantly robbed of that title after his spiteful younger brother, the impostor "Lord Lovel," murders him en route from hostilities in Wales, England's de facto subordinate and sibling (*OEB*, 2). Turmoil private and public dovetails in the next generation as well. The Fitz-Owen family is wholly at peace until the envious non-Fitz-Owen members, the kinsmen Wenlock and Markham, attempt to usurp the Fitz-Owen name and privileges. Almost concurrently, insurrections break out in an adjoining protectorate, France itself, where the populace has "revolted" to Charles the Dauphin, its own French king, instead of paying homage to the Duke of York, the English "Regent of France" (*OEB*, 32). In depicting even war-ravaged France as rightfully English territory, Reeve makes her underlying analogy between family and nation unambiguous: mutinous provinces (Wales, France) and rebellious wards (the younger Lovel, Wenlock, Markham) must alike submit to the wise rule of their preordained guardians, the English protectors (Bedford, York) and patriarchs (the elder Lovel, Fitz-Owen), or expect to be coerced into that submission.

With almost as liminal a position in the rigorously hierarchical household as Edmund, the Fitz-Owen kinsmen offer an exact but inverted composite of the protagonist himself. Much like the fabled rivals, the black pot and kettle, Wenlock and Markham protest vigilantly against the "upstart" Edmund, while Edmund and his cohorts protest no less vigilantly against them (*OEB*, 34). When at last exasperated in being "only foils to set off [Edmund's] glories," these cousins contrive to "rid themselves" of their unwelcome adversary by goading him into undertaking a "desperate enterprize" in France

(*OEB*, 34). Edmund frustrates this attempt by proposing to die in combat using the idiosyncratic "arms and device" of the elder Fitz-Owen, Robert (*OEB*, 32). The hitherto ungallant Robert, loath to have these noble accruements (and his very identity) ornament his humble servant, then deigns to exert the latent bravery of his aristocratic birth to assist Edmund in the enterprise. Not surprisingly, the lowly cousins resolve "from shame to stay behind" and are "publicly reproved for their backwardness," while Edmund, the incipient Lord Lovel, saves the entire company, ultimately meriting the "honour of knighthood" for his consummate heroics (*OEB*, 36, 39). Edmund modestly declines the knighthood, but his initial theft and belated renunciation of that inimitable index of nobility hardly constitutes a loss. Acquiring the knighthood by gift (or costume) rather than by birth would have been a pyrrhic victory: the possession of a transferrable trophy available to anyone deserving it and thence worth next to nothing in Reeve's strict accounting. To ensure that the knighthood emblemizes transcendent, unalienable nobility, Edmund patiently awaits his final transmutation into Lord Lovel before accepting the (then superfluous) knighthood *in propria persona*. However, as befits a trusty pupil of Sir Philip, Edmund condescends to accept a "large share of the spoils of [that] night," plunder which he generously distributes to the worthy denizens of his tumultuous yet ever so ubiquitous country (*OEB*, 38).[33]

The direct descent from Lord Lovel extenuates any transgression that Edmund may commit to prove that descent; indeed, what would normally be seen as selfish or unseemly in others, and especially in the Fitz-Owen kinsmen, is made to seem altruistic and heroic in Edmund himself. Thus, in collusion with Father Oswald and the elderly servant Joseph, Edmund resorts to a series of stratagems that together propel the closure of the narrative. At first, these include only lying (denying his excessive curiosity about his genealogy to the Baron), bribery (to get valuable facts despite the "obstinate silence" of his adopted mother Margery), and robbery (of the key to the closet in which his father's bones are buried), but they quickly escalate into forgery (writing letters to mystify a family enveloped in needless mystery anyway), imposture (an out-and-out counterfeit of the apocryphal "Seagrave" arms, emblem, and title), and, of course, sorcery (telepathy, dream interpretation, and even necromancy)—all in order

33 Since the hero himself appropriates the knightly attire of his noble patrons, the oxymoronic title *The Champion of Virtue* is all that much more appropriate. See n12 above.

to prove his noble extraction from the house of Lovel (*OEB*, 81). In a mock trial adjudicated by Baron Fitz-Owen, Edmund justifies this behaviour by putting himself in the position of the judge and referring to God as a witness for his veracity: "I know your goodness too well to doubt that you will do justice to me," but "if by the misrepresentations of my enemies ... your Lordship should be induced to think me guilty, I would submit to your sentence in silence, and appeal to another tribunal" (*OEB*, 51). Meanwhile, as would many lawyers of the eighteenth century, the Fitz-Owen kinsmen object that Edmund's declarations cannot in themselves stand as evidence of their own veracity, observing that his deference to the Baron's judgment actually annuls any power that feudal liege has to execute it: "he already supposes that my Lord must be in the wrong if he condemns him" (*OEB*, 51). Before metamorphosing into Lord Lovel, Edmund declares "words are all my inheritance," yet words remain his inheritance throughout, becoming more and more advantageous as he too becomes the baronial judge that he presumes to be long in advance (*OEB*, 31).

The infamous rejoinder that Walpole makes to *The Old English Baron*—"it is so probable that any trial for murder at the Old Bailey would make a more interesting story"—is fitting, for it draws attention to the improbable fiction of a well-balanced social order, the indifference towards the violent reality of contemporary events, and the vacillating reification and obfuscation of that violence which makes the apprehension of reality pivot with such unsettling dispatch from horror to romance and thereafter from extreme to extreme.[34] Reeve consequently abandons the grandiose, Gothic machinery of *The Castle of Otranto* to fortify instead the equally grandiose, yet nonetheless increasingly outmoded, faith in divinely sanctioned patriarchal transmission. The implausibility of this vision is in direct proportion to the gravity that Reeve seeks to conceal: destiny itself upholds the "illusion of feudal good lordship" and preserves the "landscape [of] social relations," notwithstanding the obvious upheavals that capitalism and

34 Walpole, *Horace Walpole's Correspondence with William Mason*, in *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W.S. Lewis, Charles H. Bennett, and Grover Cronin, Jr (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 28:380–81.

industrialization bring to each.[35] The chiasmic relation between fantasy and materiality also explains why Reeve differs from the vast majority of Gothic novelists (and from most sentimental novelists as well) in downplaying the less than ideal aspects of the patrilineal kinship system, endeavouring whenever possible to invoke an imaginary but wish-fulfilling family romance in its place.

According to Freud, this histrionic "over-estimation of the father" invariably develops into a "critical attitude," dispelled by the "influence of rivalry" and "real disappointments."[36] Such misgivings about patriarchy, and reality itself, are clearly in play in Walpole's *Otranto* and Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, as well as in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* and Frances Burney's *Evelina*. The sadistic caprices of the patriarch and the seedier elements of reality come to the surface, with relatively little prevarication, even in *Pamela*, the ostensible prototype for *The Old English Baron*.[37] Nonetheless, in reworking the novels of both Richardson and Walpole, Reeve ensures that this ultra-romanticized patriarchal imago stays firmly and unequivocally intact. Her aptly named "veil of Allegory" is undoubtedly what keeps the unwelcome reality of that imago at bay: the cluster of "agreeable fictions" modelling themselves on historical events, yet anachronistically transforming those events into hyperbolic myths most amenable to the "temper of the times" (*PR*, 1:15).

Even before composing *The Old English Baron*, Reeve publishes an adaptation of John Barclay's *Argenis* (1621), a political allegory written in the guise of an historical romance that she retitles *The Phoenix* (1772). Reeve claims that the periodicals give *The Phoenix* negative reviews simply because, in objecting to its "politics, as local and temporary" and its "principles of government, as absolute and arbitrary," they take "no notice that the high monarchical principles of *Barclay* were *moderated* by the editor" (*PR*, 1:83–84). However, this

35 Maaja Stewart, *Domestic Realities and Imperial Fictions: Jane Austen's Novels in Eighteenth-Century Contexts* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 26.

36 Freud, 9–10.

37 The unsympathetic representation of patriarchy in Richardson's *Clarissa* is likely what prompts Reeve to denounce that novel in favour of *Pamela*, a judgment that Anna Seward deems a "daring," "highly irrational" "contradiction of the general opinion." Seward, *Women Critics: 1660–1820*, ed. Folger Collective on Early Women Critics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 171. *Clarissa* is said to have the "highest graces, and most defects," requiring careful expurgation before children, women, or otherwise gullible readers can have access to it, while *Pamela*, the "*Chef d'Oeuvre* of Mr. *Richardson*," is the very barometer of propriety itself: "I should want no other criterion of a *good* or *bad* heart, than the manner in which a young person was affected by reading *Pamela*" (*PR*, 2:13–19, 1:133–137).

qualification of Barclay's monarchism—a "moderated" absolutism—entails at most a negligible tinkering in literary form and genre, not a substantive transformation of the autocratic stance itself. Reeve in fact flaunts her endorsement of that standpoint from the outset, averring in the preface, with quite an allegorical flair, that she intends to provoke the antagonism of those illicitly laying claim to their own freedom:

> Since England is become a nation of politicians, and men of all ranks and degrees believe themselves capable of investigating the art of government, and since women have written with such success upon the subject, the editor has thought herself at liberty to aim a blow at popular error, from behind Barclay, like Teucer from behind the shield of Ajax.[38]

Once aware of how unfavourably the public would respond to such a provocation—how the "Inquisition" of critics would declare that they have "no relish for the Romances of the last Century," being "sufficiently satisfied with those of the present"—Reeve no longer mistakes the reluctance with which the family romance, and especially the overtly political family romance, will be received.[39] The reading public, what Reeve at first presumes is a captive, credulous audience, embraces her rigid paternalism only after she more carefully couches its ideological content in the ostensibly apolitical genre of the "Gothic Story." Nonetheless, despite its narrative structure, *The Old English Baron* remains, much like Barclay's *Argenis*, "a romance, an allegory, and a system of politics" combined into one.[40]

To disclaim the supernaturalism in *Otranto* is not necessarily to embrace realism by default. Reeve may boast of the plausibility of her novel at least by way of contrast, but she does not thereby restrict herself to the "naturalistic dross" or "coarse realism" of verisimilitude.[41] The well-known contention in *The Progress of Romance* (1785) that good novelists, like good painters, envision a "picture ... of the times" and convey the "real life and manners" has been taken to augur the mimetic realism of the nineteenth-century novel. Yet painters in the eighteenth century did not execute, or even seek to execute, artworks with the compositional depth or photographic exactitude known to

38 Reeve, *The Phoenix: or, the History of Polyarchus and Argenis* (London, 1772), x–xi.
39 *Critical Review* (1772), cited in Reeve, *PR*, 1:82.
40 Reeve, *Phoenix*, i.
41 Rictor Norton, *Mistress of Udolpho: The Life of Ann Radcliffe* (London: Leicester University Press, 1999), 58.

subsequent periods (*PR*, 1:111). Minutiae of whatever variety, even that with cultural or symbolic import, rarely clutter the spacious horizon of the neoclassical painting, and Reeve herself scarcely takes into account even the obvious nuances of historical complexity, making explicit allusions to the past just as seldom, and just as selectively, as would any other neoclassicist. The literary historians who, failing to find in Reeve the same kind of Gothic novelist as Walpole or Radcliffe, persist in decrying her "delicious," hyperreal anachronisms—"What [Radcliffe] might allude to vaguely as a simple peasant meal, Reeve would spell out as new-laid eggs and rashers of bacon"—might inquire where in her novels they actually encounter such specificity.[42] Reeve, ever watchful of her propriety, would be surprised to find these fleshy details habitually associated with her memory, especially since she herself is so prone to burlesque this provincialism in her lower-class characters.

Much like Joshua Reynolds, who contends peremptorily that artists must "deviate from vulgar and strict historical truth," Reeve takes very little interest in the particular.[43] If Reeve attempts mimeticism, her fidelity is by no means that of the visage to the person, the background to the cultural context; her fidelity is vested much more in capturing and conditioning the ideological sensibilities of her readers than in conveying the intricacy or nicety of those environs removed spatially and temporally from her own. When the true-to-life milieux of favoured historical players are invoked in her novels, Reeve affects realism in those antiquated backdrops only insofar as that realism better supports the illusion, endowing the fictional characters whom she spotlights centre stage, and interpolates into history, with the aura of authenticity and antiquity. Likewise, when Reeve claims that *Otranto* fails to "keep within certain limits of probability" so that "the *keeping*, as in *painting*, might be preserved," she is censuring Walpole's supernaturalism in the interest of fantasy as much as in the interest of verisimilitude (*OEB*, vi–vii). According to the *OED*, "keeping" is the "maintenance of the proper relation between the representation of nearer and more distant objects in a picture," and the cumbersome introduction of representation into what is essentially a definition of

42 Norton, 58. Runge makes a similar claim; see her introduction, *The Old English Baron*, 19.
43 Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 59.

representation is significant.[44] Since the construction of reality, not reality itself, establishes the sense of proportion or "keeping," the actual distance between foreground and background is of much less importance to Reeve than the preservation of the "proper" distance, that exacting hierarchy of centre and margin, "high" and "low." Inasmuch as Reeve makes this topology seem not only unambiguous but also uncontrived, she succeeds in enforcing socio-political proportions and boundaries as much as aesthetic ones.

Ideological stances, and particularly the more contentious stances, almost invariably drive the demand for aesthetically pristine surfaces. A nearly identical appeal to proportionality and propriety structures *Plans of Education*, in which Reeve makes use of analogous language to consign the impoverished to a harsh, yet apparently welcome, servitude, as well as to buttress her unwieldy defence of the slave trade. Following François Fénelon's *Télémaque* (one of two books that the otherwise egalitarian Rousseau permits Sophie to read), Reeve describes her Utopia as picturesque containment: a "well regulated state," in which "right and true subordination is beautiful," "every order is kept in its proper state," and "none is allowed to encroach upon, or oppress another" (*PE*, 71). Although in lieu of the abolition of slavery abroad, Reeve encourages humanitarians to undertake her plans for "Charity at home," what she construes as charity seems little short of slavery itself (*PE*, 83). Drawing from the same section of the Bible—Joshua 9—that the Confederacy later uses to justify slavery in the United States, Reeve proclaims, "according to my Plan ... paupers are not to be taught to write or read," but to be brought up "to be hewers of wood and drawers of water, and to be thankful for their deliverance" (*PE*, 86–87). Where Rousseau praises exactly those weaknesses in Sophie that most facilitate Émile's control over her—"O what lovable ignorance! Happy is he who is destined to instruct her. She will not be her husband's teacher but his pupil"—Reeve laments the poverty of the masses only to exploit that poverty through schools of industry.[45] In this ideal world, conveniently impoverished peasants, no doubt more encumbered by their self-proclaimed guardians than grateful for their kind attentions, will be "brought up by hard labour," "taught their duties to God, their neighbours, and themselves"

44 *OED*, s.v. "Keeping."

45 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 410.

(*PE*, 80, 86–87). Much as Rousseau's Sophie is only metaphorically a slave while quite literally and eternally in bondage ("it is part of the order of nature that the woman obey the man"), these peasants are never slaves in name, however thoroughly enslaved in fact.[46]

Some critics might argue that *Plans of Education*, a text written during the height of the French Revolution, offers merely an exaggerated specimen of Reeve's politics, but it is clear that *The Old English Baron* advances the same protracted apologia for the same exorbitant violence. Whether we consider the militant crusades that frame the narrative's beginning and end and abruptly puncture its middle, the annihilation of the Welsh dissidents that coincides precisely with the brothers' domestic disputes, or the forced expatriation to the Turkish empire of those who impede the protagonists' class ascension via intermarriage, *The Old English Baron* is hardly a quaint, quiescent tale. Only in a fantastically reconstructed past would the poor and/or pagan enthusiastically forsake their geographical and familial roots to serve their ostensibly generous patrons, and only in a polemically driven narrative would the word "master" repeat nearly a hundred times in as many pages despite the seeming emphasis on philanthropy and social harmony, that beautiful yet brutally imposed equipoise between classes. The objection that Mary Wollstonecraft poses to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution* thus applies equally well to Reeve's no less political but much earlier implementation of the Gothic genre: "Man preys on man; and you mourn for the idle tapestry that decorated a Gothic pile ... . You mourn for the empty pageant of a name, when slavery flaps her wing."[47] For however much Reeve may seem to portray events from a perspective outside aristocratic privilege, she nevertheless identifies with that elevation, looks down from that glorified "high habitation," and by no means allows meritocracy to reign within the ground upon which she peers (*PE*, 76).

Whether in theory—*Progress of Romance*—or in practice—*The Old English Baron*—Reeve is much more interested in manufacturing and thereafter authenticating the rightful claim to a lost hereditary source than in fostering any type of egalitarian representation. Even though Reeve may insist that, like uncultivated seeds or illegitimate children,

46 Rousseau, 411. With seeming magnanimity, Reeve advocates gardens for British peasants and African slaves alike, but this cultivation (after-hours, non-paid) would defeat the sole benefit of their servitude: protection.

47 Mary Wollstonecraft, "Vindication of the Rights of Men," in *Political Writings*, ed. Janet M. Todd (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 62.

"romances are of universal growth, and not confined to any particular period or countries," she also insists, just as emphatically, that cultural guardians like herself must "separate the *grain* from the *chaff*" and "place each in their proper rank" (*PR*, 1:xv–xvi, 2:44, 1:3, respectively). The apparent focus on the similitude of novels and romances—that is, on their joint geographical, temporal, and thence omnipresent kinship—is actually a subterfuge to underscore even more scrupulously the evolutionary characteristics that serve to divide and differentiate them.[48] Likewise, in *The Old English Baron*, Reeve's primary aim is to depict the miraculous rise of meritorious virtue, while all the time insisting that such virtues arise in only the most ancient or most aristocratic families. The servants are docile and deferential in the extreme, the protagonists are uniformly male, and, no matter how much Reeve may seem to promote the adoption of worthy male bodies throughout the narrative, commending the "excellent father and master" who "seeks out merit in obscurity" and "distinguishes and rewards it," the men benefited in such a way are given the gift of being servants to those kind masters and surrogate fathers, not of being equal to them (*OEB*, 16). The protagonist Edmund is the only exception, and he is restored, not raised, to that noble estate, with his transition meticulously overseen by a network of men of undoubted "birth and breeding" (*OEB*, 72, 7). The dispensations of the divine as well as the lines of ancestry determine this promotion in status in advance, not the merit or industry that Edmund demonstrates in the world at hand.

The peculiar claim in the preface to *The Old English Baron* that "even those who so much affect to despise [fables] under one form will receive and embrace them under the other" refers to the miraculous

48 Reeve's foremost concern in *The Progress of Romance* is taxonomy, the Enlightenment drive to "name, label, describe, examine, and indeed possess natural objects." *The Enlightenment and Its Shadows*, ed. Peter Hulme and Ludmilla Jordanova (New York: Routledge, 1990), 9. Unlike those who have "walked over the ground" of the romance, marking "out its boundaries" while paying "little attention to its ... produce," whether "flowers, herbs or weeds," Reeve assumes the role of an amateur yet meticulous botanist (a role increasingly allotted to women in the eighteenth century), using her "industry and inferior talents" to examine the "minuter parts" and perform the "more laborious task of detail and arrangement" (1:viii–ix). To discriminate between these narratives, however, Reeve relies heavily on paternity, that trope of tropes, to maintain that Greek romances, which "may justly be deemed the parents of all the rest," Cervantes, whose "seed once sown, produced as plentiful a crop [in Spain], as it did the rest of Europe," and, finally, Richardson, whom to praise is to "hold a candle to the sun," are the legitimate fathers of the modern novel, with the other romances of a "different species" altogether (1:xi, 113, 134).

rise of the middle class that Edmund emblemizes, as well as to the genre of romance that facilitates (and fabricates) its tenuous claims to power and privilege (*OEB*, v). Or, as Reeve herself avers during one of the many moments of epistemological disavowal in *The Progress of Romance*, "it is not of any consequence how much or how little one knows, but the use one makes of the knowledge one has acquired. If like the industrious bee I have cull'd from various flowers my share of Honey, and stored it in the common Hive, I ... shall not have lived in vain" (*PR*, 2:98). Reeve's "Hive"—itself a metaphor that belies the indiscriminate miscegenation that engenders the feminine fortress of national literary renown—is common property solely for the elect few who can, with yet another but entirely appropriate metaphor, lay claim to the "rich ore" of chivalric prehistory, "buried under the rubbish and dross of those barbarous times" (*PR*, 1:8). In short, Edmund, the modern novel, and the middle class together "sprung up out of [the] ruins" of a bloody and barbarous past, a noble heritage that they cannot claim as their own, notwithstanding the violence that they might perpetuate to achieve a comparable socio-economic status (*PR*, 1:39–40).

As Kate Ellis has shown, women Gothicists frequently deploy the Miltonic motifs of tranquil enclosures, threatened borders, and domestically recaptured paradises in order to "set forth a new myth," accounting for the "ascendancy of the bourgeois class and its values" while also "removing that social regrouping from the domain of historical contingency."[49] Reeve certainly fits this picture, but in a unique way. Although Reeve sets out to renovate *The Castle of Otranto*—discarding the contradictions, stabilizing the discrepancies, and polishing the motives and mannerisms—she is able to do so only by doubling Walpole's key elements. In *Otranto*, there is just one castle to inherit even though two incompatible heirs inhabit it, and the space of the castle becomes more and more contracted as tensions heighten. In *The Old English Baron*, however, the castle expands, contracts, and ultimately doubles—via the haunted "East" and newly constructed "West" wings—to accommodate multiple interests. Moreover, while for many Gothic writers the "invisible hand that guides the finances in the Gothic world is not Adam Smith's ... law of supply and demand, but the hand of God himself," for Reeve, Smith's law of

49 Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 36.

supply and demand, and especially the resulting surplus value, *is* the hand of God.[50] Sons and servants enter the service of Sir Philip and the peasant Andrew Twyford just as others die off—demanding money from the latter but receiving honour (and only honour) from the former—while Edmund, awaiting the sure hand of Providence, labours not at all yet secures the rent rolls of the entire estate. Indeed, whether economic or sexual, excesses die of themselves and depletions create their own sustenance in the same mysterious manner as they do in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). Where Smith argues that "Luxury in the fair sex, while it inflames perhaps the passion for enjoyment, seems ... to frequently weaken and frequently destroy altogether, the powers of generation," Reeve argues that feudal castles will of "their own weight" collapse "into the earth," "lie buried under their own ruins," and "leave not a trace behind" (*PR*, 2:109).[51] This inexplicably beneficent capitalist economy ensures that the fraudulent Lord Lovel's offspring vanish from the realm of possibility in the very moment that Edmund rises like a phoenix to demand the barren estate: "I am childless, and one is arisen from the grave to claim my inheritance" (*OEB*, 155).

Opening and closing *The Old English Baron* is the peripheral, yet strangely emphasized, character M. Zadisky, of "Greek extraction, but brought up by a Saracen Officer," whom Sir Philip Harclay takes "prisoner," forcibly Christianizes, and conveys to England (*OEB*, 2–3). Although Reeve refers to Zadisky only in passing, his function in the narrative almost exactly parallels Edmund's own. Where Edmund bears the blood of an ancient British family, Zadisky bears the blood of that family of families, the ancient source of European nations called Western Civilization. Where Edmund, despite his humble origin, is restored to his true class, Zadisky, despite his ignominious upbringing among Arabs, is restored to his true race—each through the gentle guardianship of the British barons. As soon as Edmund becomes the "master and father" of the Lovel estate, Zadisky suddenly abandons the scene, returns to a Grecian empire that collapses upon his arrival, and salvages his own patrimony, a hitherto unmentioned son whom he also converts to Christianity (*OEB*, 16). Belatedly, Reeve introduces Zadisky's child, one apparently unencumbered by mater-

50 Ellis, 51.

51 Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 88.

nal origins—"he had discovered, by private advices, that he had a son living in Palestine, which was the chief motive of his leaving England"; the delayed introduction serves to make Zadisky's fatherhood compatible with his bondage to Sir Philip, if only retroactively, and his initial expatriation due to familial uprootedness, not coercion (*OEB*, 232). Likewise, since Zadisky imitates Sir Philip in proselytizing his son, the earlier conversion to Christianity, along with the compulsory confinement in England, seem, at least in retrospect, altruistic and paternalistic interventions, rather than aggressive impositions from an outside force.[52] Zadisky's mimicry of Sir Philip guarantees that the assimilation of British culture will persist in his family even without the British barons on hand to monitor the scene. That Zadisky would require a motive for journeying to, not journeying from, England remains unthinkable. Also unthinkable is the possibility that Zadisky, his son, and presumably that son's unmentioned mother might, in adopting the customs of Sir Philip, lose a cultural and spiritual framework of their own. In effect, Zadisky is never freed. Entering the narrative as Sir Philip's slave, yet exiting in awe of Sir Philip's generosity, Zadisky has simply become his own best captor: a surrogate Sir Philip in soul, if not in mind and body.

The civilizing influence of male patrons, who direct and delegate the inherited worth conferred by paternity, is glorified to such an extent that Reeve comes close to generating an environment in which male friends can give birth to each other without depending on the reproductive labour of women to provide genealogical continuity. It is thus not Edmund's wife but "his friend William" who sits "by his side," makes "his happiness ... complete," and acknowledges him "as a husband, and a father" during the dream sequence that presages his happy metamorphosis into Lord Lovel (*OEB*, 62). Reeve refrains from mentioning the Fitz-Owen mother until she dies, and her death is celebrated as an opportunity to bring the men together rather than mourned in and of itself: "*There is mention about this time, of the death of the Lady Fitz-Owen; but not the cause* ... . The Baron was glad of a pretence to send for them home; for he could no longer endure the

52 Such unsolicited paternalistic intervention in the domestic affairs of others, however well-intentioned, implies that those families lack the capacity or credentials to manage their affairs on their own, and such paternalism is also what Enlightenment theorists of colonialism, from Burke to William Robertson, use as a pretext to supervise the peasants and pagans still haunting the "uncultivated" lands that agrarian capitalism turns into private enclosures and colonial plantations.

absence of his children" (*OEB*, 40). The real mother of *The Old English Baron* is ultimately Lady Lovel, who enters the narrative solely through the reconstruction of Edmund's dream to offer a fairy-tale affirmation of his noble birth which supersedes the eyewitness testimony extorted from his adopted mother Margery. In short, Reeve may have attempted to "fill up" the "chasm in the history of Romance," a genre traditionally associated with women, but she leaves that maternal chasm intact in her own narrative worlds, turning the very women who must populate the scene into phantasms or phantoms, depending on which of the two—absolute surplus or out-and-out denial—the ideological alibis or economic conditions most require (*PR*, v).

Although the Twyford family in which Edmund is raised bears the stock characteristics of the male-dominated enclave that Wollstonecraft compares to "Mahometan" tyranny in order to reform, it is actually more akin to the working-class, non-gentrified portions of the middle class from which Reeve and Wollstonecraft each seek to extricate themselves. Undoubtedly, in adopting Edmund to replace a recently miscarried son (brusquely informing his wife, "I have brought you a child instead of that you lost"), Andrew transgresses the idealized precepts of childhood individualism soon to prevail in romantic poetry and the Victorian novel (*OEB*, 83). This type of exchange had nonetheless been a customary, and distinctively English, practice since the late seventeenth century. As Alan Macfarlane notes, "in many societies it was essential to produce, or even overproduce, children in order to provide the right labour force, [but] in England it was possible to use the much more flexible mechanism of [service], ... a form of *ex post facto* family planning. Surpluses of children could be sent off, or labour shortages made up by hiring children."[53] Edmund "Twyford" proves a poor investment, however. Much like the women who, according to Wollstonecraft, turn "sickly" and "delicate" owing to their "sedentary employments," but also much like any self-respecting child of the middle class, as Edmund grows older, he becomes "sickly and tender" and "could not bear hard labour" (*OEB*, 87).[54] Upon catching this surrogate child and domestic servant "alone reading," Andrew declares, "if he did not find some way to earn his bread, [I will] turn him out of doors in a very short time" (*OEB*, 88).

53 Alan Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction 1300–1840* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 83.

54 Wollstonecraft, "Vindication of the Rights of Woman," in *Political Writings*, 155.

Once Andrew secures his own son, a patrilineal line that the heroes of *The Old English Baron* covet, and in fact acquire five times over, he begins to "grumble, and say, it was hard to maintain other folks' children, when he found it hard enough to keep his own" (*OEB*, 87). In thus preferring his own offspring, Andrew makes a belated claim to a paternal inheritance largely forbidden the working poor during the eighteenth century, when the real-world equivalents of Lovel, Fitz-Owen, and Edmund himself are privatizing the common lands with little remuneration to the many lower-class families whom they displace.[55]

In the end, Andrew, and not his "servant" Edmund, violates middle-class ideology, and Andrew violates that ideology simply because he treats Edmund, a princeling-in-disguise, exactly as he is *supposed* to treat his own children: solely in terms of their use value, not their intrinsic merit. Naturally, Reeve herself would employ the descendants of such a father in precisely the same fashion—after all, in this type of family that "we must look for our soldiers and sailors, and servants of all and every kind"—however much she admonishes Andrew, who is certainly not the only one converting the members of a family (or, rather, the members of *some* families) into a labour pool for ship captains, tenant farmers, and middle-class novelists alike (*PE*, 69–70). While ordinary servants would have little licence to defy their employers, Edmund's disobedience is portrayed as a simple matter of course. The purportedly intrinsic value that Andrew overlooks in Edmund, and the lone characteristic that secures this foundling's position outside the exchange economy and outside the corrupted axiomatics of commercial self-interest, is charity. His adopted mother declares that, however useless, Edmund would "run errands," do "many handy turns for the neighbours," and behave "so courteous[ly] that people took notice of him" (*OEB*, 88). Tempting as it is to interpret this characterization of Edmund, who later attends the Fitz-Owen family like "faithful servant of the upper kind," as a surreptitious critique of the undervalued and overlooked labour of women, it more likely stems from Reeve's interest in the middle class as a

55 As the social historian Roy Porter puts it, the "veneer of paternalism was often stained by the brutality with which great landowners emparked, enclosed, exploited the game laws and rode roughshod over customary tenant and villager rights. Exemplary punishment [was] tendered with silver linings of philanthropy, largesse and selective patronage ... . Therein lay the sly magic of authority [but] behind the show, the underlying power was real." *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Penguin, 1982), 64, 66.

whole, a class which, as Nancy Armstrong has shown, exploits discourses about femininity to establish coherent, homogeneous affiliations across ambiguous class lines "at a time when other representations of the social world suggest that no such class yet existed" (*OEB*, 19).[56] Edmund's elevation is therefore feminine but not female: feminine enough to guarantee a modest, non-material, yet innately valuable circulation—or, as Armstrong puts it, without "value located in the material body," yet with "depths far more valuable than her surface"—but also masculine enough to guarantee a seamless transplantation into the Lovel patrimony.[57]

The extreme contrast between the Twyford family and the Wyatts, the peasants with whom Sir Philip stays at the beginning of *The Old English Baron*, reflects the strict distinction that Reeve makes throughout the narrative between contractual, remunerated employment and what she construes to be the voluntary vassalage of feudalism. Where Andrew supplies the place of a miscarried son with the ineffective helpmeet Edmund, Sir Philip supplies the place of a deceased servant (and surrogate child) with the only son of Mr Wyatt, his humble but generous host. Sir Philip's amicable treatment of Mr Wyatt, the basic courtesy that almost any guest would offer a host, is frequently said to corroborate Reeve's advocacy of merit over birth. For, instead of lodging in the castle among those of his own status, Sir Philip voluntarily elects to stay in the cottage, where he can converse with Wyatt on "common subjects" like "fellow-creatures of the same natural form and endowments" (*OEB*, 9). Without a doubt, this amicability does point to the "meritocratic spirit" that distinguishes many of the "'good' male characters" in *The Old English Baron*, whose "hardly [medieval] or even ... eighteenth-century" deportment makes the novel often seem anachronistic.[58] However, the upshot of this amicability is not, as Ellis and others might suggest, an amelioration of the class hierarchy but a legitimization of its continued enforcement. Not only does Reeve imply that the mere presence of a knight would be a boon to Mr Wyatt (even when Wyatt himself, and not the knight, confers the favour of hospitality), but she also quickly qualifies Sir Philip's initial egalitarianism, alleging that since "different kinds of

56 Nancy Armstrong, *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays on Literature and the History of Sexuality*, ed. Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (New York: Methuen, 1987), 101.

57 Armstrong, 114.

58 Ellis, 64.

education had given a conscious superiority to the one, and a conscious inferiority to the other," a "due respect was paid by the latter, without being exacted by the former" (*OEB*, 9).

With this anachronistic interpolation of the virtues of education, or what would more properly be called "gentrification," into feudal history, Reeve tries to rationalize the hierarchy rapidly intensifying between the upper and lower strata of the middle class. For in naturalizing Wyatt's "conscious inferiority" to Sir Philip, Reeve endows that hierarchy, a hierarchy relatively new to the eighteenth century, with an established precedent in the past, at once explaining its prevalence in the present and validating its continuation for the future. This retroactive veneration of education even allows Reeve to transform the mutually binding, albeit flagrantly unequal, contractual labour of the Enlightenment era into the unpaid fealty and abject bondage of the Middle Ages. When Sir Philip offers to take Wyatt's son into service, he proclaims, "it will be my pride to prefer [John] to such a noble gentleman; I will make no terms for him, but leave your Honour to do for him as he shall deserve," and John himself declares, "though I am somewhat aukward, I shall be proud to learn, to please my noble Master" (*OEB*, 25–26). Much like the Arabian-raised Zadisky, John binds himself as a vassal to Sir Philip and leaves his paternal home; moreover, like Zadisky, John tenders this service out of gratitude for his education, or "conversion," refusing to demand any kind of quid pro quo of money for labour. Sir Philip thus attains unlimited control over yet another live male body, a labouring body of considerable valuable during the late eighteenth century, quite literally without "having to exact" his "due respect." An implicit pledge of honour, but little accountability to the law, enforces his promise that Wyatt "shall be no loser" in forfeiting the labour of a son (*OEB*, 9, 26). In fact, surrogate fatherhood trumps biology to such an extent that, immediately after the "bargain was struck," Sir Philip purchases "a horse for John of the old man," as if a horse alienated from "old man" Wyatt's estate could even be a gift to John, his son and obvious heir (*OEB*, 26). Much like a dowry, this horse serves as a token nod to the respective economic positions of the two fathers, its commodification providing a convenient way to reify, re-enact, and then renounce the exchange of human labour that truly motivates the intercourse between them.

John Locke would certainly object to Wyatt's presumed ability to

barter in his sons (or as he would say, "use their Persons as he pleases"), but Locke would also object to Reeve's glorification of an economic exchange that has such iniquitous terms.[59] According to Locke, no man can "make use of another's necessity, to force him to become his Vassal" any more than "he that has more strength can seize upon a weaker, master him to his Obedience, and with a Dagger at his Throat offer him Death or Slavery."[60] Reeve's intimation that this appropriation of labour is a harmless, and even a fortuitous, occurrence for the Wyatt family effectually renders domestic servants willing slaves rather than contractual employees invested with rights that, at least to some extent, compensate for their disproportionate responsibilities.[61] Even more importantly, Reeve makes education extenuate the vast asymmetry in power between the rich and poor, the aspiration, not the munificent conceit, of the bourgeoisie. Without any aristocratic prerogatives to which to lay claim (or, at least, any legitimate ones), the gentrified and professionalized middle classes can only point to education as the factor that sets them above the servants who perform their labour, servants who, in turn, generate the time, space, and money necessary for them to perfect an education and exacerbate that hierarchy even further. Sir Philip thus acquires Edmund in the same way as he acquires John (that is, as he tells the Baron, in an "endeavour to replace" the lost "blessings" of his departed servant), but John remains a bonded though beloved servant, whereas Edmund, tutored in the "learned ... languages" by a hired clerk and the captive Zadisky, acquires the literary credentials that absolve his temporary transgression of the otherwise inflexible social strata (*OEB*, 4, 14). Reeve's characterization of the Wyatt family is therefore important not because it exemplifies her ostensible emphasis on education and egalitarianism, but because it early establishes the structure of paternity by proxy, the appropriation ("adoption") of children, and the exchange of men between men that underpins Reeve's vision of society as a whole.

59 John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), bk. 1, 2.9.

60 Locke, bk. 1, 4.42–43.

61 As those in the pre-contractual, pre-civil realm of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, Reeve's servants forsake their liberty in exchange for their master's "protection," one who in forming "a little body politic or 'family' ... is then also master of the woman servant's children [namely, John] and master of everything that his servant owns [namely, the horse]." Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 48.

Ultimately, the middle-class perspective—that homogeneous, empiricist, third-person perspective available to everyone and thereby belonging to no one—may lack an ancient tradition with which to justify its omniscience, but it can be all the more exacting and uncompromising because of its lacking those long-worn origins and time-honed guarantees. With these expedient prostheses of history and genealogy, Reeve is able to portray the gratuitous, but still largely landless, prosperity of the middle class as the inner working of providence itself: what once was poverty (and mistaken identity) becomes perpetual power and privilege, the rags-to-riches fantasy of a much-deserved but hitherto unrecognized nobility. Moreover, the progressive romance, or, to be more precise, the romance of progress, converts the labour of the working classes into the divinely ordained prerogative of the gentry and aristocracy alike—illiberal and lop-sided blessings to say the least. The familiar assumption that Reeve, unlike "the aristocrat, Walpole," seeks to portray "gentility and merit" as "dissociated from social position" is thus as inaccurate as it is common.[62] We cannot assume that class positions are necessary harbingers of class identifications, especially since Michael McKeon has shown that distinctions between the gentry and aristocracy are by that time nominal distinctions at best, no matter how vigilantly their symbolic valences continue to be policed.[63] If anything, an "educated, middle-class background" makes Reeve *less* receptive to "gentility and merit" circulating irrespective of social status, while Walpole's aristocratic rank (a rather dubious one) makes him not only more willing but also more free to expose the hypocrisy of inherited privilege.[64] On the other hand, Reeve may seek to eschew, insofar as possible, the messy complexity of historical retrospection (providing cosmetically reconstructed evocations of the past and cautiously modifying her Gothic imagination accordingly), but few of the writers who afterwards venture into the literary terrain of the Gothic will follow suit. Like many premature reformers, Reeve unwittingly

62 Fred Botting, *Gothic* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 55.

63 Michael McKeon argues that the middle class saturated the "external shell" of the nobility, because of the aristocracy's "wholesale adoption of 'antiaristocratic' elements." *Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 167.

64 Botting, 55. As the son of a notoriously "common" but only belatedly knighted prime minister (Sir Robert Walpole), Horace Walpole could not be considered an aristocrat in any typical sense, especially considering the frequency with which he satirizes aristocratic pretension in Whig pamphlets, imaginative writing (see, for example, "The Entail"), or the voluminous correspondence.

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institutionalizes the very misbehaviour that she aims to pre-empt. For, on the whole, Gothic novelists will revert to the truly Gothic genre inaugurated with Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, unsettling, if not openly contesting, the precarious ideological boundaries that Reeve attempts to reinstate with *The Old English Baron*. An unequivocal advocate of Enlightenment progress—a proclivity put into question by Walpole and even further problematized by such novelists as Radcliffe, Sophia Lee, and Charlotte Smith—Reeve stands in stark contrast to those who eventually develop the genre that she so early seeks to commandeer.[65]

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