

Patriarchal Narratives in the Work of Horace Walpole, Clara Reeve, and Sophia Lee

The Structure of Patriarchy

Early gothic novels make absolutely clear the genre's concern with exploring, defining, and ultimately defending patriarchy.¹ Patriarchy is a term that can seem to lack critical force, perhaps because it has so often been used to talk rather impressionistically about any sort of social structure that seems to be run by men. Such uses of the term are not entirely inaccurate, but they flatten out the historical specificity and richness that it should rightly conjure up. When Walpole published the "first" gothic novel in the mid-1760s, he was writing at the end of nearly a century of debates about whether human society was intrinsically patriarchal or whether it was in fact the result of a social contract among its members.

Carol Pateman has forcefully summarized and critiqued the debate between the patriarchalists and the contract theorists, and in the following pages I present those parts of her argument that are most salient to a reading of gothic novels.² As Pateman reminds us, the most extreme version of the patriarchal argument had been put forward in Sir Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha* (1680). Published at the

height of the Exclusion Crisis in Britain, when Parliament had made repeated efforts to ensure that the Catholic James II would not succeed to the throne, and written much earlier, probably during the period leading up to the beheading of Charles I, this treatise is an unwavering argument for the divine right of kings to rule over their people.³ Filmer locates the derivation of monarchy in literal patriarchy or fatherhood, reaching back to the Bible for his precedents, and citing Adam as the first patriarchal ruler. Adam's patriarchal authority was that of a father first and king second; as Filmer writes, "not only Adam but the succeeding patriarchs had, by right of fatherhood, royal authority over their children" (1991: 6). Logic dictates that the roles of father and king would become distinct from each other when a king's subjects began to include more than his biological descendants, and Filmer himself acknowledges that by the time he is writing it "may seem absurd to maintain that kings now are the fathers of their people" (1991: 10). He clings to the connection, however, arguing that kings "either are, or are to be reputed as the next heirs to those progenitors who were at first the natural parents of the whole people, and in their right succeed to the exercise of supreme jurisdiction" (1991: 10). Scholars of Filmer have argued that, where "traditional patriarchal argument" made an analogy between the roles of king and father, he went further, "claiming that paternal and political power were not merely analogous but *identical*" (Pateman 1988: 24).⁴ This conflation of the roles of father and king creates logical problems, however, for "if fathers were the same as kings, wielding the same absolute power, then there could be no 'king', merely a multitude of father-kings" (Pateman 1988: 84).

Alternatives to what Pateman describes as Filmer's "classic patriarchalism" came most powerfully in the work of those philosophers who argued that human society was the result of a social contract. Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau were among the principal proponents of contract theory, and over time they succeeded in shifting radically the ways in which social organization was understood. Pateman credits Locke with formulating the "historically decisive" response to Filmer when he proposed distinguishing between "paternal power" and "political power" (Pateman 1988: 85), and so doing away with the problem of the "father-kings."

Where Filmer had insisted that people were born subject to a patriarchal rule that went as far back as Adam, Locke, in his *Second Treatise on Government* (1690), argued that they existed in "a *State of perfect Freedom* to order their Actions, and dispose of their Possessions, and Persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the Law of Nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the Will of any other Man" (Locke 1988: 269 [II, §4]). The individual's movement from this state of nature into a civil society occurs with the making of a "Compact" among people "agreeing together mutually to enter into one Community, and make one Body Politick" (1988: 276-7 [II, §14]). While this "body politic" is composed

entirely of men, it marks an advance on Filmer's vision of society because it is recognized as a cultural rather than a natural formation, because it is egalitarian, and because it is seen as distinct from the domestic sphere of the family. Locke articulates a seemingly revisionist view of domesticity as well, arguing that the "first Society was between Man and Wife" and resulted from a "voluntary Compact" whose "chief End" is "Procreation" (1988: 319 [II, §§77–8]), while the family they produce is one which is shaped not by "Paternal Power" but by "Parental Power" (1988: 303f [II, §§52f]), in which "the *Mother* too has her share with the *Father*" (1988: 310 [II, §64]). A second look at his redefinitions of both the political and domestic spheres shows that patriarchy had not been so much left behind, however, as redefined.

Pateman argues convincingly that Filmer's classic patriarchalism is not abandoned but modified in the contract theory defined by Locke and others. Filmer was aware that "[s]ons do not spring up like mushrooms" (cited in Pateman 1988: 87), and that men's domination of women is therefore founded in "*sex-right or conjugal right*" even more than in the "*right of fatherhood*" (Pateman 1988: 87). He did his best to downplay women's role in procreation, however, presenting the father as the parent who gives life and the mother as simply the "vessel" who enables him to do so. The contract theorists necessarily modified this view of male (pro)creative power when they ceased to see the state as a family, though perhaps not with the consequences one might have expected. In their view, men were no longer perpetuating a social order through their sexual relations with women, but, rather, were producing it without the help of women at all. Seeking to wrest power from the single father/king and vest it in all men, the contract theorists created a model of civil society based not in paternal but in fraternal authority: not fatherhood but brotherhood provides the conceptual frame for Locke's civil society (Pateman 1988: 102–3). Thus came about what Pateman has called "perhaps the greatest tale of men's creation of new political life" (1988: 36), and a social vision that is even more masculinist than the one it replaced. Women are no longer needed even as vessels in the birthing of this new state order, and are important only as vessels of birthing in the domestic order, where Locke's vision of the father and mother as equal partners is severely undercut by his assertion of a husband's "Conjugal Power" over his wife (Locke 1988: 174 [I, §48]).

Considering Pateman's analysis of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century debates about the nature of social and self-government, a reader of gothic novels cannot but notice her insistence on the fact that patriarchy persists – albeit with changes – from the seventeenth century to the eighteenth, and, still more importantly, that it changes in ways that ever more effectively exclude women from participation in the social order.⁵ For gothic novels are all about patriarchies, about how they function, what threatens them, what keeps them going. And what becomes ever clearer as one reads these novels is that patriarchy is not only

the subject of gothic novels, but is itself a gothic structure. Patriarchy inevitably celebrates a male creative power that demands the suppression – and sometimes the outright sacrifice – of women.

The Tie to Sensibility

The second half of the eighteenth century has long been known as the “age of sensibility” (Frye 1956), with “sensibility” referring to a capacity for strong and generally sympathetic feeling. “Sensibility” is sufficiently imprecise in its connotations that it often slides over into its near synonym, “sentimentality” (Todd 1988: 6–10), though sufficiently precise that its opposition to the term “sense” – meaning “common sense” or “good sense” or rational thought – is always clear. While “*sensibility* is associated with the body” and “*sentiment* with the mind” (Van Sant 1993: 4), that distinction tends to blur when one studies how the terms were generally used, and even current criticism does not always keep the two rigorously distinct.

The period’s fascination with the “sensible” and the “sentimental” stems from a range of well-researched sources, usefully summarized by Claudia Johnson, whose work I draw on here. In part the interest came from medicine, which was increasingly interested in the nervous system of the human body, and believed that we register experience in the very fibres of our being. In part it came from religious debates about the innate “goodness or badness of human nature” (Johnson 1995: 12). And in part it came from the political contexts in which those debates were taking place, arguing for “sociable man’s sensitivity. . . . Because the subjects of the state are sensitive to each other’s approval and disapproval – craving the former and avoiding the latter – they observe and sustain shared customs without requiring the intervention of authoritarian rule” (Johnson 1995: 13). The explicit politics of the sensible and sentimental shade into the politics of what Johnson describes as “‘polite culture,’ where ‘polite’ refers principally to the increased presence of and deference to women in social life, and to the belief that the sociable commingling of the sexes promoted the polish and refinement of men” (Johnson 1995: 13).

For the reader of gothic novels, what is particularly interesting about sensibility is its relationship to gender. Insofar as it has been seen as a democratizing force (everyone has feelings), sensibility might be seen as a potential means of levelling the ground between men and women. More often it has been read as the province of women, while “men of feeling” risked being seen as feminized. Recent work on this topic has usefully complicated our vision, however.

Claudia Johnson has argued that sentimentality did not feminize men so much as it masculinized feeling. Focusing her analysis on novels of the 1790s, she argues

that “the affective practices associated with [sentimentality] are valued *not* because they are understood as feminine, but precisely and only insofar as they have been recoded as masculine” (1995: 14). Thus women are left “without a distinct gender site” and are in effect “equivocal beings” (1995: 11). They may occupy an important position in sentimental culture, but their “presence . . . is not to be confused with [their] empowerment there” (1995: 14). Yet George Haggerty suggests that not just women, but also men, can become “equivocal beings” in a world defined by sensibility and sentimentality, and that “equivocation” may not be such a bad thing if what it does is disrupt the binary gender system that defines patriarchal culture (1998: 14). Where Johnson and other recent critics see sensibility and sentimentality as forces that maintain the status quo, Haggerty is more interested in the ways in which they threaten established social structures. Building on the work of Slavoj Žižek, Haggerty argues that sensibility is in effect a “symptom” of what a culture has repressed (1998: 3, 1999: 83–4). And what has been repressed is pleasure, desire, the possibility of social change. Sensibility can point the way to the dissolution of the self (in male writers), to the restructuring of gender relations (in female writers), and to different ways of being male and female (in both) (Haggerty 1998: ch. 3, 1999: introduction).

Pateman’s work on patriarchy resonates alongside this recent work on sensibility and sentimentality. On the one hand, sensibility can be deployed to support patriarchal structures. Indeed, to support a political structure by emotional means seems particularly canny, for while emotions are in fact highly codified forms of cultural expression, they do not look like they are. They look natural, and thus the structure they support seems all the more inevitable. On the other hand, sensibility has the potential to disrupt not just patriarchal structures but the gender definitions in which patriarchy is grounded. In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss three early gothic novels that explore the structure of patriarchy with increasing reference to sensibility.

The Castle of Otranto and The Old English Baron

Horace Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Clara Reeve’s *The Old English Baron* (1777) are usefully paired.⁶ Both portray what Pateman would describe as classic patriarchal societies and both focus explicitly on the question that is central to the survival of those societies: the passage of power through the male line. *The Castle of Otranto* was written first, and does much to establish what might be called the formula of gothic fiction. The novel opens with Manfred, the heir to a usurped kingdom, learning that a giant helmet has fallen from the sky and crushed his only son on his wedding day. Manfred struggles from that point on to retain his power over Otranto, seeking to control

the women who can in various ways affect the line of succession: his wife Hippolita, his daughter Matilda, and the woman who was nearly his daughter-in-law, Isabella. His tyranny over these women is thwarted by a series of supernatural interventions, however, and by the end of the novel the rule of Otranto passes back to the rightful heir. Reeve's novel tells a similar story, but with considerably less supernatural apparatus. While both authors anatomize the basic principles of patriarchal government, making clear their interest in its structure, its workings, and its means of self-perpetuation, they do so in ways that suggest significantly different understandings of why and how it has come to exist.

The Castle of Otranto imagines a society much like those described in Filmer's *Patriarcha*. The identification between state and familial power is complete in Manfred, who rules both with the same iron hand. The conflict in *Otranto* is not over whether this form of patriarchy should exist, but over how corruption in such a patriarchy can be rooted out, how a patriarchy based on "might" can be replaced by one based on "right." Manfred's power has come down to him from his ancestor Ricardo, who had himself poisoned his master Alfonso and then taken on his role. Manfred's power stems from his ancestor's act of violence, in other words, and the events of the novel focus on his desperate attempts to maintain that power through further violence. Manfred's violence initially directs itself against the supernatural disasters that repeatedly threaten his rule, and especially against the peasant Theodore. When Theodore observes that the helmet on the statue of Alfonso the Good resembles the helmet that killed Conrad, inadvertently suggesting that the legitimate ruler of the house of Otranto has killed an illegitimate heir, Manfred responds by trying to kill Theodore in turn. Far more importantly, however, Manfred's violence directs itself against the seemingly natural world of the novel, and especially against the women who populate it. Manfred has to rely on women to perpetuate his rule, and works to control them in any way he can.

From the moment that Conrad is killed, Manfred knows that his family's hold on the throne of Otranto is jeopardized, for he has no male heir. When he is reminded of the wife who provided him with his one sickly and now dead son, he cries out, "Curse on Hippolita! . . . forget her from this moment, as I do" (p. 22). When his daughter Matilda tries to comfort him following the death of Conrad, he responds only by saying, "Begone, I do not want a daughter" (p. 21). Even as he had tried to kill Theodore, so he rhetorically does away with both his daughter and his wife in order to make room for the one woman who can give him an heir: Isabella, who was to have married his son and whom he now decides to pursue himself, shifting from prospective father-in-law to prospective husband in an instant. The violence he directs at Isabella is the most extreme we have seen yet, for when his arguments for their marriage draw only horrified rejections

from her, he literally chases her through the castle and into a series of subterranean tunnels by which she eventually escapes. The confusion at the end of the novel, when Manfred stabs a woman whom he believes to be Isabella but who in fact turns out to be Matilda, makes clear the terrible cost of his actions. The figuratively incestuous penetration of his daughter kills her and ends his rule as well. His world literally collapses around him.⁷

Manfred needs women to perpetuate his line of descent, but does not want to accord them any power. Were there a way to perpetuate the patriarchy without women, Manfred might be happy, and while Manfred cannot accomplish this miracle, Walpole can. When the walls of the castle come down around Manfred, and “the form of Alfonso, dilated to an immense magnitude, appear[s] in the centre of the ruins” to set things to rights, one understands that the patriarchal order will be perpetuated not by living women but by dead men (p. 108). Alfonso’s ghost appears to tell the story of his ancestor’s death, as well as to proclaim Theodore his rightful heir. By the time Theodore ventures to produce his own mother’s written testimony to all that has been said, even that has been deemed superfluous.

Importantly, Walpole knows that this effacement of women is a literal impossibility, even as he knows that his turn to the supernatural is incredible, and he takes pains to draw attention to these facts. Alfonso’s appearance is the last in a series of notably two-dimensional supernatural events that begins with the appearance of the giant helmet on the first page of the novel, and the gradual re-remembering of the body of Alfonso the Good is also a remembering of his story. This act of remembering is arguably intended to do justice to the rightful heirs of Otranto, even as it just as arguably does an injustice to the women who bore them. In the context of the plot, in other words, it would seem to be an act of high seriousness, and so one must wonder why it tends to appear to readers as something akin to comedy. Why should the body of the patriarch “excite laughter,” to use Clara Reeve’s phrase? (p. 5). Because patriarchy is laughable? Perhaps, but a little more subtlety is in order. What provokes a smile here is the obviously artificial nature of the construct.⁸ The more clearly one sees the body of Alfonso – the body of the patriarch, and, by extension, the body of patriarchy – the more comprehensible it becomes. And the more comprehensible it becomes, the less frightening it becomes. One might think here of Edmund Burke’s observation that fear – hallmark of those experiences that he called sublime – grows out of obscurity, while “a clear idea is . . . a little idea” (1968: 63). By the end of the novel, the big body of patriarchy may still be terrifying to the characters within the novel, but it has been brought well within the grasp of the novel’s readers, who have the advantage of contemplating that body in its entirety.

Clara Reeve was one of the first readers of Walpole, and she found his practice of building up suspense only to subvert it with a ludicrously literal supernatural event disconcerting. Perhaps she did not see Walpole's interest in how the supernatural enabled but also exposed the paradoxes of a patriarchal social order that wanted to do away with women, or perhaps she was simply not willing to understand the exposure of patriarchy as a convincing critique of it. Feeling that Walpole should have produced terror through and through, Reeve responded to him by writing *The Champion of Virtue; a Gothic Story*, which appeared in 1777, and a year later was republished with the title by which most readers know it today, *The Old English Baron*. She acknowledges her novel to be "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 modern Novel, at the same time it assumes a character and manner of its own, that differs from both" (p. 3). Her aim is to bring together "a sufficient degree of the marvellous, to excite the attention; enough of the manners of real life, to give an air of probability to the work; and enough of the pathetic, to engage the heart in its behalf" (p. 4). In her view, Walpole had accomplished two out of three, but had a "redundancy" of the marvellous thanks to "machinery . . . so violent, that it destroys the effect it is intended to excite" (p. 4). Where Walpole had used an overblown supernatural to at least hint that patriarchy could be seen as a comically imaginative construct, Reeve's insistence that the supernatural be "kept within the utmost verge of probability" (p. 4) results in a far less laughable, and so far more conservative, view of the patriarchal politics that are also at the heart of her novel.

Like Walpole's novel, Reeve's tells a story of patriarchy disrupted, showing us one man who has come to power through crimes not his own, and another who has been deprived of that power through those same crimes. Where Walpole relies on the supernatural from the start, however, Reeve – true to her own principles – invokes it seldom and with relative subtlety. She relies on a vocabulary that moves in small degrees from realism, through what one might call the surreal, to the supernatural in telling the story of how Edmund – counterpart to Walpole's Theodore – comes to be recognized as the true heir of Lovel.⁹

When Reeve's novel opens, the Baron Fitz-Owen reigns in the castle of Lovel, having purchased it from his brother-in-law, who had in turn inherited it from his deceased brother. Fitz-Owen has taken Edmund into his household, and while Edmund is but the "son of a cottager" (p. 17), he nonetheless outshines everyone else in the family. Reeve emphasizes the fact that Edmund's noble blood manifests itself in both his good looks and his temperament. His striking resemblance to his father gains him the immediate attention of Sir Philip Harclay, who had been a close friend of the deceased Lord Lovel; the Baron Fitz-Owen comments

that Edmund's "uncommon merit, and gentleness of manners, distinguishes him from those of his own class" (p. 17); even the servant Joseph says to Edmund, "I cannot help thinking you were born to a higher station than you now hold" (p. 25). When the time comes for Edmund to prove his identity, these inborn qualities – along with the solid empirical evidence provided by his adoptive mother, and discovered in the castle itself – do much to help him make his case.

Empirical evidence alone does not restore Edmund's patrimony, however. Reeve turns from the rational to the irrational – but not yet the supernatural – when she assigns to dreams some of the revelations that Walpole gave to supernatural agents. Only a few pages into the novel, Sir Philip Harclay has "strange and incoherent dreams" that foretell much of the novel's plot (p. 14). Similarly, Edmund's first clue that he really is the heir of Lovel comes to him during the first night he spends in a supposedly haunted chamber, when he dreams that he is visited by "a Warrior, leading a Lady by the hand," who identify him as their child, announce that they are "employed in [his] preservation," and then leave him to visions that again predict what actually happens in the novel (pp. 44–5). Reeve's use of dreams recalls but revises Walpole's account of writing *The Castle of Otranto*:

⋮ Shall I even confess to you what was the origin of this romance? I waked one
⋮ morning in the beginning of last June from a dream, of which all I could recover
⋮ was, that I had thought myself in an ancient castle (a very natural dream for a head
⋮ filled like mine with Gothic story) and that on the uppermost bannister of a great
⋮ staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour. In the evening I sat down and began to
⋮ write, without knowing in the least what I intended to say or relate. (p. ix)¹⁰

Both Walpole and Reeve connect the supernatural with dreams. Walpole simply does away with the framework of the dream, thereby exposing the irrationality and implausibility of human experience. In contrast, Reeve holds on to that framework for at least a while, straddling the boundary between the rational world she wishes to depict and the irrational qualities she knows it to include, and perhaps even stretching or blurring our definitions of rational and irrational in the process.¹¹

Reeve does not rest in that half-way position for ever, but aids Edmund's progress toward self-knowledge as well as power by allowing him to be guided by a series of supernatural signs that help lead him to the truth about his heritage. Collapsing armor "calls" him to the room in which his parents will later prove to be buried (p. 52); a groan from beneath the floorboards where his father's body lies inspires him to go out and seek empirical evidence of who his parents really were (pp. 52–4); the groans and ghostly appearance of the murdered Lord Lovel drive those who would thwart Edmund's purposes from the room (p. 78);

the doors of the castle of Lovel fly open of their own accord when Edmund finally enters the castle with proof of his heritage (pp. 130–1). As if to qualify even these minor supernatural incidents, however, Reeve takes pains elsewhere in the novel to render them ever so slightly ironic. When Edmund leaves the castle to seek the assistance of Sir Philip Harclay in proving his lineage, he deliberately mystifies his departure so that the supposedly haunted room in which he has been staying – and which really does hold the secret of his paternity – will not be disturbed by other members of the household. He disappears “in the dead of night” in a way that is meant to “terrify and confound all the family” (p. 64), leaving a note for the Baron from the “guardian of the haunted apartment” along with the key and instructions to protect it “until the right owner shall come” (p. 71). That some of the family immediately suspect Edmund of writing the note further emphasizes Reeve’s tendency to bring common sense to bear on the seemingly supernatural.

Reeve takes care to distinguish her work from Walpole’s, though in the end Walpole’s supernatural and Reeve’s dreams and other irrational events serve very similar purposes. Like Walpole, Reeve uses these supernatural events to establish the proper shape of patriarchy, reconstructing and ensuring the continuance of the system almost entirely without the help of women. Indeed, Reeve is even more conservative than Walpole in her imagining of this possibility, for where Walpole clearly made fun of it even as he indulged himself in imagining it, Reeve does no such thing. Hers is a world in which female authority is not even a problem to be handled, but is simply not there at all, at least not to any appreciable degree. Reeve’s novel makes the relationships between men and women that will be so fundamental to the action of later gothic novels secondary to the relationships between men who structure the patriarchy.

In its focus on male–male relationships, Reeve’s novel describes a world like those discussed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985), who has argued that “large-scale social structures” – like patriarchal societies – function much like erotic triangles in which two men are interested in a single woman who stands between them. The relationship that matters most in the triangle is not either of the male–female relationships that one sees at first glance. Rather, it is the relationship between the two men, who are rivals for the one woman, and have what Sedgwick describes as a “homosocial” connection with each other (1985: 25). Sedgwick’s discussion of the relationship between the homosocial and the homosexual makes clear that the two exist on a not always obvious continuum with each other, and so opens the way to a reading of desire focused on same-sex as well as opposite-sex relations in Reeve’s novel.¹²

While one can argue that the most important relationships in *The Castle of Otranto* are the father–son ties that perpetuate patriarchy, their primacy emerges clearly only at the end of the novel. In contrast, *The Old English Baron* focuses on

relationships between men from the start (Haggerty 1998). These relationships at times take the form of rivalry, even of enmity, yet those at the heart of the novel are notable above all for being built on great affection. Edmund's connection to his servant Joseph is one such tie; his attachment to the priest Oswald is another. Among the most important are those with his "two paternal friends," Baron Fitz-Owen and Sir Philip Harclay (p. 146). Early in the novel, Edmund responds to the possibility that he will have to leave the Baron's household with a speech so expressive of his heartfelt desire to stay where he is that he moves himself, the Baron, and Sir Philip to tears. The Baron comments on how "this boy engages the heart" (p. 20), even as Sir Philip had earlier described how Edmund's "strong resemblance . . . to a certain dear friend" had initially "touched [his] heart in [Edmund's] favor" (p. 19). These men are linked through affective bonds that only grow stronger as the novel progresses, reaching a peak when Edmund goes to Sir Philip with evidence that he is in fact the son of that "dear friend" he so much resembles.

..... Sir Philip grew every moment more affected by the recital; sometimes he clasped his hands together, he lifted them up to heaven, he smote his breast, he sighed, he exclaimed aloud; when Edmund related his dream, he breathed short, and seemed to devour him with attention; when he described the fatal closet, he trembled, sighed, sobbed, and was almost suffocated with his agitations: But when he related all that passed between his supposed mother and himself, and finally produced the jewels, the proofs of his birth, and the death of his unfortunate mother – he flew to him, he pressed him to his bosom, he strove to speak, but speech was for some minutes denied: He wept aloud . . . (p. 86)

The remarkable intensity of this scene is not matched elsewhere in the novel. Its portrait of the relationship between Sir Philip and Edmund suggests the primacy of father–son bonds, whose importance in the novel is also marked simply by the fact that Edmund has no fewer than four father figures (in addition to the Baron and Sir Philip, there are also Andrew Twyford, the cottager who discovers him as an abandoned infant and takes him into his household, and the murdered Lovel, who was Edmund's biological father).

Insofar as Sir Philip's strong tie to Edmund derives from the latter's strong resemblance to his deceased father, one can also read their connection as one that testifies to the importance of male friendship,¹³ and a similarly intense friendship between men is seen in the relationship between Edmund and William, the second son of Baron Fitz-Owen. Early in the novel we read that the Baron Fitz-Owen's sons "doat upon" Edmund, "especially Master William, who is about his own age," and that connection only deepens over time (p. 15). William goes to fight the French with Edmund as his "attendant," "treat[ing] him in public as his principal domestic, but in private as his chosen friend and brother" (p. 26). His

“dear friend William” is the only person with whom Edmund communicates individually when he leaves the Baron’s castle to seek Sir Philip’s support in regaining the Lovel estate, and when he has finally acceded to the estate, we read that “William and Edmund renewed their vows of everlasting friendship” in the same moment that we learn of the “mutual vows” that guarantee Edmund’s marriage to William’s sister Emma.

That pairing of the vows between Edmund and William with those between William and Emma is not accidental. Female characters figure minimally in this novel (as Haggerty 1998 also notes), and only when their appearance will help to ensure the reproduction and maintenance of the patriarchal line. We read briefly of Edmund’s biological mother, the late Lady Lovel, who is remembered above all for dying at the moment she gave birth to her son; Margery Twyford, Edmund’s adoptive mother, functions primarily to legitimate his claim to the Lovel estate; Lord Clifford’s daughter, otherwise unnamed, is in part a bargaining chip that helps resolve the political tangles brought about by Edmund’s claiming of his title. Emma’s place in this limited world of women reinforces this general pattern but is somewhat more complex.

Heterosexual relationships facilitate but also screen the homosocial relationships that are more primary, and one does not have to look hard to see that Edmund’s relationship with Emma is linked to his relationship with William. When Edmund requests Emma’s hand in marriage, he states, “I never loved any woman but her; and, if I am so unfortunate as to be refused her, I will not marry at all. . . . Give me your lovely daughter! Give me also your son, my beloved William!” (p. 126). He will have Emma or no one, perhaps because only with Emma can he have William. In wrapping up the stories of its various characters, the novel tells us that Edmund’s “third son was called William; he inherited the fortune of his uncle of that name, who adopted him, and he made the castle of Lovel his residence, and died a bachelor” (p. 152). William the uncle is figuratively identified with his nephew of the same name, and in that merged figure we see Edmund’s beloved, his son, his heir, and in some sense a double for himself.

By its conclusion, *The Old English Baron* demonstrates the shaping of not one but two patriarchal lines. Edmund’s discovery of his paternity and his marriage to Emma ensures the production of biological successors. At the same time, Edmund’s friendship with William creates a successor of another kind, for William junior is in a sense their child as well. Insofar as he represents both his father (biologically) and his uncle (in his name), he is their offspring, and a testimony to the productive power of male relationships in a patriarchal society that relies less on women than on dreams, ghosts, and otherworldly revelations for its survival.

Finally, it is useful to consider how Reeve and Walpole think about their projects, specifically about how their discussions of their own literary lineage relate

to their thinking on the subject of lineage more generally. Walpole's self-presentation is the more obviously complicated, given that his novel initially appeared as an anonymous translation of an existing Italian manuscript written by one Onuphrio Muralto, and only in the second edition was claimed by Walpole as his own. Walpole's reluctance to reveal himself as the author of *Otranto* speaks in part of his concern about how the novel would be received, but also plays into the novel's interest in the fragility of patriarchal stories and the little reason we have to trust the lineages they work so hard to preserve. What Walpole could not do, Reeve can, however. Like Walpole, she does not reveal herself as author of her novel until the publication of the second edition, though her reasons for doing so are somewhat different. Reeve's decision suggests her understanding of how difficult it was to be both a "proper lady" and a "woman writer" (Poovey 1984) in the patriarchal world in which she lived. It is ironic that, in emulating the strengths and correcting what she takes to be the weaknesses in Walpole's story, her novel shows us just how to render patriarchy secure.¹⁴

The Recess

While both Walpole and Reeve expose but also endorse the workings of patriarchal society, Sophia Lee's *The Recess* does not.¹⁵ Published over the years 1783–5, *The Recess* is a stunning accomplishment. Relatively early in the gothic tradition, it brings together a number of what would over time become identified as its signature issues: an overarching interest in the workings of a patriarchal society, the haunting of the present by the past, the entrapment of women, and an interest in the extent to which sensibility contributes to or alleviates that entrapment.¹⁶ It explores all of these issues in a more explicitly political context than most of its successors, through a narrative that is rooted in the historical rivalry between Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots for the throne of England, and develops into a fictional narrative about the making of both English history and women's authority.¹⁷

In focusing her novel on Elizabeth I and Mary Stuart, Lee ensured that her readers would direct their thinking about patriarchy, women, and power to a particular set of questions. At the most general level, the fact that Elizabeth and Mary are both women asks readers to consider the relationship between England's explicitly patriarchal system of government and the women who contended for the role of "patriarch." More specifically, the fact that Elizabeth was Protestant while Mary was Catholic asks readers to think about Renaissance England's uneasy positioning between these two religions (a timely issue, given the violence of the anti-Catholic "Gordon Riots" in 1780),¹⁸ and to consider the

relationship between the identity of the nation and the identity of its ruler. Most specifically, given that Elizabeth's and Mary's stories emerge in and alongside first-person narratives supposedly written by Mary's fictional daughters, we are asked to consider what it might mean to talk about public and private identity in the lives of women who could imagine themselves in positions of political power.

The Recess begins from the fictional premise that, during her imprisonment by Elizabeth, Mary secretly took as her husband the duke of Norfolk and by him had twin daughters, Matilda and Ellinor. Because their mother remains imprisoned while their father first fights and then dies in his battle against Elizabeth, the infant girls are spirited off to the recess of the title – in actuality a secret dwelling built in the ruins of a convent (p. 22) – to be raised in safety. They learn the story of their birth just a little while before they leave the recess to live in a larger world, and, once in that larger world, they are plagued by a series of disasters.

The sisters' problems all begin with their connection to Mary. Mary's claim to the English throne means that they have one too, and, as Lee tells it, Elizabeth's execution of Mary is just the beginning of her effort to contain the threat that they pose. Political relationships between and among women thus motivate the novel's action at its deepest level, yet they are overlaid by romantic relationships that complicate and to an extent screen the novel's politics, as the sisters develop connections with Elizabeth's two favorites, the earl of Leicester and the earl of Essex. When Leicester secretly marries Matilda, he marries a woman whom he knows to be both a political and a sexual rival to Elizabeth, and the first half of the novel turns on the complications caused by this marriage. When Essex forms a secret attachment to Ellinor, he does basically the same thing, and much of the novel's second half turns on the problems caused by this situation. In both cases, the straightforward political contest between Elizabeth and the sisters is transformed into a sexual contest that shifts attention away from state politics to personal life.

The first generation: Mary and Elizabeth

The historical figures of Mary Stuart and Elizabeth Tudor have been imagined and reimagined over time, and *The Recess* participates in this effort. As one would expect in a story told by the supposed daughters of Mary Queen of Scots, Lee's narrative is one that glorifies Mary and villainizes Elizabeth. Jayne Elizabeth Lewis has written of the eighteenth century's transformation of Mary into a sentimental heroine who was understood more as an icon of "vulnerable femininity" (1998: 130) than as a Catholic queen who posed a significant threat to the

English throne (1998: 103–23). In contrast to the sentimental Mary, whose helpless situation inspires sympathy in all those around her, Elizabeth emerges as a passionate woman whose power inspires those around her with fear, approaching the stature of what in the next chapter I will discuss as a sublime figure.

Mary's story is told by Mrs. Marlow, the woman who has functioned as a surrogate mother to Mary's daughters, and it is above all a tale of successive imprisonments. We first read of Mary "imprisoned by her subjects as an accessory to the murder of her husband" (p. 24). She manages to escape her prison and throws herself on Elizabeth's mercy, only to find herself "in a worse condition than if she had still remained in her own country" (pp. 24–5), imprisoned at Bolton Castle in Yorkshire. Finally, we read of her courtship by the duke of Norfolk, whose ambition to marry her because of her rank is seemingly transformed into a desire to marry her for love, yet the marriage – accomplished in secret – is judged an "error, which heightened every affliction, and gave new pangs to a long, long captivity" (p. 28). All of these "misfortunes" are said to have "had their source in love" (p. 28), and Mary's captivity is thus defined as a product of sensibility. She is a true gothic heroine.

As Lewis has argued, Mary not only acts on the basis of her own sensibility, but inspires equally feeling responses in others. When Matilda sees her mother walking in the garden that is a part of her prison, supported by her maids, with "beads and cross . . . her only ornaments," she reports that Mary "mingled the Saint with the Queen," and that she and Ellinor "wept – we incoherently exclaimed – and striking ourselves eagerly against the bars, seemed to hope some supernatural strength would break them" (p. 75). It is as if Matilda and Ellinor are the prisoners, rather than Mary, and while they attract her attention by putting their hands through the bars of the window, the connection lasts only a moment before she walks away.

As this exchange shows, Mary's legacy to her daughters is not only their royal blood, which guarantees their imprisonment in the recess, at Kenilworth, at court, and in their lives beyond the court. That legacy consists also of their conventionally defined femininity, their propensity to act on and so eventually be trapped by their feelings.¹⁹ As if she understands the danger of legacies for women, Elizabeth does her best to detach herself from the dangers of inheritances, and to define herself in isolation from those around her.

Susan Frye (1993) has written about how the historical Elizabeth grappled with the seeming disjunction between her roles as a public ruler and private citizen, tracing Elizabeth's efforts to redefine what it meant to be a patriarchal ruler, and elucidating the "competition for representation" that followed her death. Lee participates in this "competition for representation" of Elizabeth, yet shifts the ground of debate significantly when she questions the legitimacy of

Elizabeth's reign not because she is a woman, but because of the kind of woman she is.

Elizabeth does not appear in the novel until near the end of the first volume, though she is discussed from early on. First to mention her is Mrs. Marlow, who portrays the queen as a woman who was motivated by fear to order the sisters' father beheaded and their mother imprisoned, a woman whose court the girls – according to their father's command – were never to see. Robert Dudley, the earl of Leicester and a long-time favorite of Elizabeth, predictably offers a more sympathetic account of the queen. He does not so much deny Elizabeth's penchant for power as contextualize it, talking about the time she herself spent imprisoned by the order of her predecessor Mary Tudor, and her subjection during that time to the unwanted attentions of the earl of Devonshire (whom Leicester helped her to fend off) (pp. 44–8). Elizabeth here looks like another gothic heroine in the making, and yet she refuses the role. She is neither helpless nor desirous of being ruled by her feelings, and, having acceded to the throne, she purports to be ruled by politics above all. As Leicester recalls, she had told him:

..... that although she preferred me to all men existing, she could not by marrying make me happy, or be so herself; that in yielding to this weakness of her heart, she should forever sully her reputation for wisdom, which would always, while single, teach her how to manage other potentates, either by hope or fear; and that such a degradation in general opinion would too sensibly affect her. (p. 52)

When she later changes her mind and announces her desire to marry him, she leads into the topic by explaining that “now, when I have no potent enemy to fear, I may crown thy passion and indulge my own” (p. 94). The suggestion is that, because her political house is in order, she is at last free to act according to her affections, yet this vision is quickly recast: “A new plot I have discovered to release Mary, renders it absolutely necessary I should, by marrying, cut off her hopes and those of her party” (p. 94). Politics not only precede but also subsume personal affections, so fully that one is not even sure those affections really exist. Elizabeth's overt refusal to be ruled by her heart differentiates her from Mary, and could be seen as explaining her success as England's monarch. The rest of the novel tells another story, however, for if Lee's Elizabeth does not want to be ruled by her heart, Lee suggests that, to some degree, she is.

The single most notable characteristic of Lee's Elizabeth is her jealousy, which reveals itself in her dealings with her two favorites, the earl of Leicester and the earl of Essex. That jealousy surfaces when she first sees Mary as her rival for Leicester's affections, though all he has done is admire a miniature portrait of her, and while Leicester at that point describes Elizabeth as “jealous to excess of her power” (p. 50), he understands that her jealousy has a sexual basis as well.

This becomes clear when he conceals from her his marriage to Lady Essex, having acknowledged that Elizabeth has “rigidly maintained over [him] the rights of a jealous lover, while she disclaimed the title” (p. 54). And when he conceals from her his subsequent marriage to Matilda, along with the far weightier secret that Matilda has a claim to the English throne, he is clearly motivated by a desire to evade both forms of jealousy.

Mary and Elizabeth thus offer two approaches to the shaping of history. In spite of her rank, Mary follows the dictates of patriarchy and plays the woman’s traditional role. Using her rank, Elizabeth manipulates the patriarchy, but does not do away with it. The more severe critiques of the patriarchy come from the younger women of the novel, Matilda and Ellinor, whose repeated efforts to claim their place in that order ironically challenge it at the same time, albeit unsuccessfully. By the conclusion of the novel, all proofs of Matilda’s and Ellinor’s connections to the Queen of Scots have been destroyed, and the sisters’ place in official history has been thoroughly effaced. Yet their autobiographical statements remain, providing an alternative version to official records, and making clear that the sisters have claimed agency and identity through their writing.

The second generation: Matilda and Ellinor

Part of the power of Lee’s novel comes from her creation of the distinct and often opposed voices of Matilda and Ellinor. Matilda’s narrative can seem to have greater authority, primarily because the novel as a whole takes the form of a letter that Matilda writes to a friend, in which Ellinor’s narrative is embedded, and also because Ellinor’s narrative trails off into madness. However, it would be a mistake to put more weight on the words of one sister than on those of the other, for their stories complement each other in their portraits of two very different experiences of – and responses to – oppression. Matilda tries to assert an identity built on her connections to her mother, her daughter, and the community of women that helps her to survive.²⁰ In contrast, Ellinor increasingly seeks to escape an identity that has functioned to oppress her.

The sisters begin life together, living partly in the “recess” of the title and partly in the abbey attached to it. The recess and the abbey together recall the once dominant Catholic culture that their imprisoned mother still represents, and clearly genders that culture as well. The recess itself is built on the ruins of a convent “once inhabited by nuns of the order of St. Winifred” (p. 22), which even then was linked to the monastery that was the precursor to the current abbey. The religious affiliations of these structures change over time, as the recess remains Catholic, while the abbey becomes the property of the Protestant Lord Scrope. The gender connotations of these spaces also grow more complicated,

as the recess is taken over and enlarged by Catholic fathers, though I want to argue that its primary association with women persists into the time represented by the novel.

Its existence hidden even from those who inhabit the abbey to which it is attached, this subterranean home is the female and arguably maternal domain of Mrs. Marlow, sister to Lord Scrope as well as the only mother the sisters have ever known. The feminized character of the space is enhanced by its physical configuration, which Matilda recalls as the novel opens:

∴ This Recess could not be called a cave, because it was composed of various rooms; and the stones were obviously united by labor; yet every room was distinct, and divided from the rest by a vaulted passage with many stairs, while our light proceeded from small casements of painted glass, so infinitely above our reach we could never seek a world beyond; and so dim, that the beams of the sun were almost a new object to us when we quitted this retirement. (pp. 7–8)

Lest the identification of the recess as maternal still seem too easy, a reflexive linking of enclosed spaces with the enclosed space of the womb, Lee goes out of her way to make this connection still clearer.²¹ When the sisters are forced to return to the recess after three years spent in the abbey, they enter through a secret passage. A storeroom in the abbey leads to stairs, passages, and at last into the recess through “a door the size of that portrait which first gave [Matilda] such singular sensations” (p. 15). The portrait in question could perhaps be that of the sisters’ father, the duke of Norfolk, which they had earlier regarded with “veneration” and “surprising softness” (p. 9), but seems more likely to be that of Mary, Queen of Scots, which had inspired a far stronger reaction: “a thousand melting sensations,” involuntary tears, and the certainty that the portrait “is but part of one great mystery” which will one day be revealed to them (p. 10). Without doubt, however, the portrait in question is one associated with the girls’ parentage, and the most important thing about their parents is their maternal lineage – their connection with the Queen of Scots. Thus the physical entry into the recess is also the entry into that maternal history.

Throughout the novel, Matilda tries unceasingly to gain public recognition of the fact that Mary Stuart is her mother, and her life comes to seem merged with that of her mother in the process. That merging begins with the fact that she looks exactly like her mother (even as Ellinor looks exactly like their father), and is helped along by the fact that her way out of the recess comes when she meets Lord Leicester. Leicester is first mentioned in the novel as the person on whom the duke of Norfolk most relied in his efforts to free Mary and have Elizabeth recognize his marriage to her, and – as I mentioned above – he himself is at one point seen as a suitor to Mary. When the sisters meet him as he flees through

the forest near the recess, Matilda offers him shelter in their underground home, and from that moment on is attached to him. The fact that he has just poisoned his wife and her lover should perhaps cast a pall over his speedy marriage to Matilda, which at the insistence of Father Anthony – the girls’ guardian following the death of Mrs. Marlow – takes place before he leaves that sanctuary. In Matilda’s eyes, however, the match is made for love, and she willingly agrees to keep it a secret in order to protect herself and her husband from the wrath of Elizabeth.

In linking her fate to that of Leicester, Matilda has in one sense found a way to move from the recess to a larger world, though in another she is perhaps still more confined than she has been. When she and Ellinor take up residence in Leicester’s home at Kenilworth, fears of Elizabeth lead them to hide not only the fact of Matilda’s marriage, but their very identities. Disguised as “young women educated in a Convent, who, not finding a call to the monastic life, came . . . to embellish the retirement of Lord Leicester by [their] musical talents” (p. 66), they appear before Elizabeth. Like Walpole’s Theodore and Reeve’s Edmund, however, they are unable to hide fully their noble blood. In a memorable scene, Matilda sings while Ellinor accompanies her on the lute, both hidden from the view of the company. The performance is so marvelous that the queen orders the curtain to be drawn aside to reveal the performers, and when she becomes suspicious about their identities Leicester tells a story about them that can do nothing to alleviate whatever fears Elizabeth may have. While he does not admit that they are the daughters of Mary Stuart, he does say that they are the children of his brother and Lady Jane Grey, hidden away in the now dead hope of again succeeding to the throne;²² to this already complicated story, he adds that they should be told they are his illegitimate daughters. As Matilda quickly sees, his story places them “almost as near to the throne as [they] really stood” (p. 82), and she knows that Elizabeth is not taken in by the story when she says nothing, but simply makes them her maids of honor. There, thinks Matilda, she can bring about their “safe and silent ruin” (p. 82).

For Leicester and Matilda, that ruin comes when Elizabeth’s offer to marry Leicester renders the discovery of his marriage imminent. At this point Matilda’s need to protect herself from Elizabeth’s persecution renders her life still more like her mother’s, and her success in doing so renders the difference between them more palpable as well. She and Leicester flee, first back to the recess, where they are betrayed by one of Leicester’s enemies (a former servant), but, helped by one of Matilda’s friends (Rose Cecil), they go on to France, where they are betrayed by Matilda’s Catholic relations, the Mortimer family. Leicester is killed, while the pregnant Matilda is forcibly taken by John Mortimer, son of the woman from whom she had expected protection, and put on a boat to Jamaica, where he owns a plantation.

As Matilda's horizons broaden to include not just England, but also France and Jamaica, so do those of the novel, becoming more explicitly political than they have been. The flight to France brings to the surface the religious tensions that have been lurking throughout the novel. While the sisters have a Catholic mother, were raised by the Catholic Mrs. Marlow and Father Anthony, and spent their early lives in a "recess," whose history as first a Catholic convent and then a Catholic monastery is well known to them, explicit questions of religious affiliation do not surface until Matilda actually finds herself in France. For a number of reasons, what she describes as her "fluctuating religious principles" (p. 128) here become firmly aligned with Protestantism.

The most obvious reason that Matilda turns from Catholicism to Protestantism concerns her husband. Her relation Lady Mortimer represents the marriage as invalid because it "want[s] the sanction of the Pope," then addresses this problem by arranging the murder of Lord Leicester in his bed, in the hope that Matilda will then renounce her errors and claim her place as the "head of the English Catholic party" (p. 127). Predictably, Matilda does just the reverse, responding to this conjunction of events by condemning a religion that would rely on "midnight tapers, suspended black, or waving plumes" to "relieve those eyes which seek in vain their only object" (p. 128). As important as these events, if not more so, is the fact that Matilda's embrace of Protestantism coincides with the execution of her mother at Elizabeth's command. Catholicism in this novel is the religion of the mother, and when she dies, so does all explicit allegiance to her faith. Implicitly, however, Matilda's Catholicism continues to surface at moments in the novel when she is most like the mother whose death she mourns.

Matilda's entrapment by Lady Mortimer is followed by similar treatment at the hands of Lady Mortimer's son, John, who abducts her, puts her on a boat, and takes her to his estate in Jamaica with the aim of forcing her to marry him. Matilda's unwanted interaction with the French is thus complicated by an even more unwanted interaction with the Spanish, who occupied Jamaica at the end of the sixteenth century, and with whom Mortimer is allied by marriage. Lee more or less conflates the Spanish and the French here, both Catholic countries and both known for their interest in gaining the throne of England, and initially seems to set both in opposition to the English Protestant Matilda.²³ The clear dichotomy quickly breaks down, however.

Matilda is saved from a forced marriage by a rebellion of Mortimer's slaves, who kill their master and would have killed his mistress too, had she not been saved by two of the rebels themselves: a Spaniard named Emmanuel (who timed the rebellion to free her) and a slave named Aimor. When the rebels are in turn defeated, Matilda is pictured sitting at the foot of a tree, the child she bore Lord Leicester on her lap, her hands reaching out to Emmanuel on the one hand and Aimor on the other. She describes herself as the "Queen of Sorrow" (p. 142), and

her physical position echoes that of the Virgin Mary in her guise as the “Mater Dolorosa.” In this moment of extreme vulnerability, she is strongly identified with both the Catholic Mary who is the mother of God, and with that other Catholic Mary who was her own mother.²⁴

Matilda’s identity thus continues to waver between Catholic and Protestant, but is now further complicated by her positioning between cultures and races as well. When the colonial governor imprisons her for what he takes to be her role in the rebellion, she spends eight years in jail, and is freed only through the intervention of the governor’s mistress, a well-to-do black woman named Anana. Anana initially shows great kindness to Matilda’s daughter Mary, and eventually – following the death of the governor – buys the freedom of the mother and daughter. This vision of interracial solidarity is perhaps fanciful, for white European women in the late eighteenth century were as much part of the colonial project as anyone, yet it makes clear Lee’s sense that such solidarity is needed if women are to find a way past the constraints of the patriarchal society in which they live.²⁵

The notion that female solidarity is necessary for women to escape the literal and figurative constraints on their lives pervades the book (Isaac 1996). Matilda relies on a series of women over the course of the novel – Mrs. Marlow, her sister, Lady Arundell at court, Rose Cecil in her flight to France, and Anana in the West Indies. These women are not immortal, however, and they die off one by one. By the time she returns to England, only her sister and Lady Arundell are still alive from among this group, and neither of them lives much longer. Matilda is at this point left with her daughter as her sole hope and support, and that bond breaks too in the novel’s final movement, when her daughter is poisoned by the wife of a lover. Add to that the fact that this last crisis takes place in yet another prison, where Matilda’s brother – who is also Elizabeth’s successor – has confined them after destroying all evidence of their kinship to Mary Stuart, and the future seems bleak indeed. Yet, when there would seem to be no alternative to her entrapment and isolation, and finally the effacement of both herself and her story, Matilda finds a way. She retires to France – once again implicitly turning to the Catholicism that the novel officially rejects – and writes her story, addressing it to the daughter of the French ambassador to England. She thus ensures the existence of an alternative to the official narratives of the period, and a critique of England’s patriarchy, if not a way out of it.

Matilda’s life imitates that of her mother more than she might wish it to, and if neither she nor her daughter ever gains official recognition as Mary’s heir, she at least survives her many trials. Her survival comes in part because she behaves so much like a typical gothic heroine.²⁶ While she transgresses a basic rule when she allows Leicester into the recess, she is thereafter fairly passive, finding her

way out of one disastrous situation after another only because someone comes along to rescue her; the single exception to this pattern comes in her efforts to free herself and her daughter from their final incarceration at the earl of Somerset's castle. Ellinor's story is the more dire as well as the more radical, for she resists the role of gothic heroine far more than Matilda does. She is at times more active on her own behalf, while at others she is far more inclined to give up hope altogether. If she succeeds in escaping the literal as well as the figurative prisons in which she finds herself, the price is very high: she pays first with her sanity and finally with her life.

Ellinor's narrative picks up at the point at which the sisters' lives began to diverge – that is, at the point at which Matilda marries Leicester – and is remarkable for its reinterpretation of events already laid out by Matilda. In Ellinor's account, the admirable Leicester emerges as an ambitious and self-serving man who is not to be trusted, and is contrasted to the man with whom she forms an alliance – the earl of Essex. Ellinor's relationship with Essex is always tumultuous, for the two are attracted to each other from the start, but kept apart by a series of circumstantial problems. Their continued separation causes Ellinor to move in and out of states of madness, while Essex gradually ceases to behave as the queen wishes him to, and instead comes to be ruled by his heart.

The story of Ellinor's separation from Essex begins in earnest when Elizabeth has discovered Ellinor's connection to Mary Queen of Scots, and just after Matilda has fled to France with Leicester. Elizabeth's desire to protect her crown thus merges with her jealousy of both Leicester and Essex to determine the initial motive for her treatment of Ellinor. This conflation of the political with the personal persists, as Elizabeth has her agents trick Ellinor into signing a document disavowing her connection to Mary Queen of Scots, the reward for which was to have been Mary's life, though Elizabeth later has Mary executed anyway. Tied to this manipulation is Ellinor's forced marriage to the insipid Lord Arlington, which she is told will keep Essex from the death to which he would be sentenced for having been involved in a plot to free Mary. That Essex never was in any such danger is something Ellinor does not discover until much later.

This series of events precipitates Ellinor's madness, which finally emerges as a way of escaping the confines of her bodily existence. She describes her initial loss of sanity in this way: "the deep melancholy which had seized upon my brain soon tintured my whole mass of blood – my intellects strangely blackened and confused, frequently realized scenes and objects that never existed, annihilating many which daily passed before my eyes" (p. 182). For the rest of her life, Ellinor will pass in and out of such states, fleeing the various traps by which she is confined. Her marriage, court politics, the circumstances of the moment disappear as she leaves behind the most fundamental of all traps, her embodied self. That

self – female, forced to conform to the rules of the world in which she lives – is finally only a prison for Ellinor. And so, as Essex says, her “soul . . . like a frightened bird, forsakes its home when misery hovers over it” (p. 264).

With this pattern in mind, one understands why her encounters with Essex – fraught with danger as they always are – consistently result in her losing her identity in some way. At times, that self-loss takes the relatively conventional form of simply losing self-consciousness. Thus, when she sees Essex for the first time after her marriage to another man, she gradually loses control: “They told me, I suffered myself to be led to the chair of the Queen, who no sooner in the common form presented me her hand, than I haughtily repelled it, and fixing my eyes on her with a dreadful meaning, gave a deep groan, and sunk senseless at her feet” (pp. 187–8). Similarly, the next time she sees Essex, after both have been away from London for a considerable time, she experiences “fear” and “horror” (p. 220), feels herself “deeply disordered” (p. 203), succumbs to “agitation” and “sensibility” (p. 203), and then to “[a] suffocation more painful than fainting” (p. 203). Their meeting was accidental, yet she regrets that she does not altogether lose her “erring reason” when her husband unexpectedly finds them together, and does manage to faint away in an attempt to stop them from duelling (pp. 203–4).

More interesting are the forms of self-loss that emerge once Ellinor and Essex are both widowed, and so seemingly free to marry each other. Ellinor’s former husband had arranged for her continued incarceration after his death, a prospect which nearly drives her mad again. This time the appearance of Essex revives her, but knowing that she cannot simply leave with him in her own person, she sends him on ahead and then plans her own escape. Significantly, she gets away from Arlington’s family by faking her own death as well as the death of a servant, after which she is carried out of the castle in the casket of her servant, and has the satisfaction of seeing the servant mourned in her place.

Having effaced her own identity altogether, she re-emerges as a cross-dressed youth to follow Essex to where he is fighting in Ireland. This is Ellinor’s colonial experience, a counterpart to Matilda’s time in the West Indies, and she too ends up imprisoned – trapped in an enemy camp. She does not wait for a benefactor, however, but reincarnates herself yet again by drugging the commander of the camp, dressing in his clothing, and making her way to the English. She is thus temporarily reunited with Essex, but the two separate again so that Essex can seek out Elizabeth and explain why he has spent so long in Ireland, while she proceeds separately to England. She ends up shipwrecked in Scotland for many months, initially passing once again for a young man, and then for a young woman of rank, though she never reveals her true identity.

By the time Ellinor returns to England, Essex has been imprisoned in the Tower, and at this point she succumbs for the last time to madness. Long assumed dead by all, she is taken for a ghost when she wanders into the queen’s cham-

bers and berates her for having had Essex beheaded. Ellinor persists in this “undead” state some time longer, and eventually expires in front of a portrait of Essex, the same portrait she had been admiring when their unexpected meeting led to the duel between Essex and her husband. Essex is thus not fully present but only represented, even as Ellinor herself is not fully present when she expires in front of it, and in this juxtaposition one sees the pain of Ellinor’s story. When she was functioning in the world as she was expected to, she (and arguably everyone else) was – as she said of herself and Matilda – “all an illusion” (p. 157). In her periods of madness, her presence was just as illusory, and no real indicator of her identity; as Margaret Doody has noted, “her madness is a simple reflection of what exists outside herself” (1977: 559). A substantive existence does not seem possible in Ellinor’s world. What Essex called the “soul” is either trapped or driven out by appearances, with the result that the world is peopled by shadows, illusions, and ghosts, and can only be described as gothic.²⁷