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‘This is a dark story’:
Representations of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Gothic Literature
(1764–1794)

by

Jonathan James Dent

Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the award of

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Abstract

“‘This is a dark story:’ Representations of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Gothic Literature (1764–1794)” contends that the Gothic can be read as a complex reaction to Enlightenment methods of historical representation. It discusses the ways in which both familiar (such as David Hume’s *The History of England*, 1754–62) and lesser known historical works (such as Paul M. Rapin de Thoyras’s *History of England*, 1721–31) influenced and shaped the genre, uncovering in the process hitherto neglected relationships between Gothic fiction and prominent works of eighteenth-century history. As well as discussing established Gothic novelists such as Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe, the thesis breaks from tradition by devoting chapters to Clara Reeve and Sophia Lee, important women writers whose works are often ignored or marginalised in discussions of the genre’s origins.

Emphasising the heterogeneity of the Gothic in the eighteenth century, it shows how, although writers employ and develop similar tropes, they use them for diverse ends. Gothic pasts are sites of intense conflict, with authors (particularly female ones) often writing fictional histories to comment on pressing socio-historical issues.

Tracing the Gothic’s development from Walpole to Radcliffe (and beyond), this thesis goes on to re-evaluate the literary implications of the French Revolution. Suggesting new areas of enquiry for Gothic scholarship, it argues that the transgressions taking place in France shattered Enlightenment models of historical understanding and that historical discussion moved from multi-volume tomes to the domain of the political pamphlet.

Contending that the Gothic reacts to changing conceptions of history and the past at this time, it maintains that the French Revolution caused the Gothic to develop and exhibit a heightened state of historical consciousness. Furthermore, the thesis demonstrates how the settings of Gothic narratives move forward in historical time throughout the eighteenth century, arguing that the turbulent context of the 1790s provides an explanation for this tendency. With the Revolution in France consuming itself in the Terror, and the British government passing oppressive legislation in order to prevent a similar uprising in England, it is argued that the present had become a more frightening place than the past, and that, because of this, Gothic fiction became increasingly willing to jettison historical and geographical displacement. Although Gothic attitudes towards the past continued to be influenced by the genre’s earlier contentious relationship with Enlightenment historiography, Gothic narratives became less dependent on history as a site of terror, and began to situate themselves ever-closer to the present, with significant repercussions for the genre throughout the nineteenth century.
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Abbreviations

The following editions are used throughout this thesis:


1 Introduction: History and the Gothic in the Eighteenth Century

I believe this is the historical Age…

David Hume to William Strahan (August, 1770)

The first ages of Scottish History are dark and fabulous. Nations, as well as men, arrive at maturity by degrees, and the events which happened during their infancy or early youth, cannot be recollected, and deserve not to be remembered.

William Robertson, *The History of Scotland* (1759)

But when I am sure that in all ages there can be but little dependence on history, I cannot swallow the legends of the darkest period in our annals. In one word, Sir, I have often said that History in general is a Romance that is believed, and that Romance is a History that is not believed; and that I do not see much other difference between them.

Horace Walpole to Dr. Henry (15 March, 1783)

It is a dark and stormy night. Alone inside a room in a ruined abbey located in a gloomy forest, an orphan discovers a secret door that is hidden behind a tapestry. She opens it and, after descending a few steps, finds herself in an ancient chamber. The only sound she can hear is the wind that whistles through the apartment. As she explores her surroundings, the moonlight which shines through a shattered casement is obscured by a cloud and she is temporarily left in total darkness. Trembling, she trips over something on the floor. The moonlight returns and she learns that the object she stumbled over is an old dagger spotted with what appears to be rust. Surveying the room, she discovers mouldering furniture, dust, cobwebs and an old, decaying manuscript. Struggling to read the fragments that are still legible, she learns to her horror that the script was written by someone who was murdered in the abbey many years ago. This chilling sequence of events features, of course, in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) and, typical of eighteenth-century English Gothic novels, a repressed and macabre history lurks at the heart of the narrative. In all of the Gothic novels discussed in this thesis, dark stories and sinister pasts return to haunt the present. Whether it is fragmented scripts, discarded documents, fractured histories, ancient artefacts, decaying architecture, confused ancestry, generational conflict, a preoccupation with origins or the presence of history through supernatural occurrences, the Gothic is obsessed with the nature of the past and our relationship with it. As David Hume’s epigraph to this chapter indicates, interest in the systematic analysis and study of the past...
exploded in the eighteenth century, and the Gothic capitalised on the century’s attraction to history.

The Gothic is everywhere fascinated by the past. In recent years, Gothic criticism has witnessed a resurgence of historicised readings of texts and, while this renewed critical focus recognises the importance of historical context, little attention has been paid to how such texts actually construct and represent the past. Why is this genre seemingly fixated with sinister histories? For what reasons is it so concerned with historical authenticity, and what techniques do Gothic writers employ to excavate and dramatise it? How do Gothic pasts differ from each other? To what extent do they portray contemporary anxieties and what are the implications of such pasts for our relationship with history? In his seminal *The Literature of Terror* (1980), David Punter comments that the Gothic represents ‘a particular attitude towards the recapture of history’ (1996, 1: 4) and that it ‘seems to have been a mode of history, a way of perceiving an obscure past and interpreting it’ (1: 52). He also comments that the Gothic provides a ‘genuine substitute’ for history and functions as a means of understanding ‘those barbaric areas where knowledge had not quite penetrated’ (1: 98). However, characteristic of many critical responses to the Gothic over the decades, Punter conducts predominantly psychoanalytic and Marxist readings of Gothic texts and does not develop these ideas, or their wider implications for the genre.

Considering the relationship between the Gothic and dominant eighteenth-century modes of historical writing, this thesis employs a historical, contextual and philosophical approach to significantly develop these notions. Indeed, there are currently no studies which focus exclusively on Gothic pasts and few which consider the relationship between early Gothic fiction and eighteenth-century historical writing. Contending that the Gothic can be read as a complex reaction to Enlightenment methods of historical representation, this thesis uncovers until-now neglected relationships between Gothic texts and prominent works of eighteenth-century history. Bringing an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the Gothic, this thesis addresses a long neglected aspect of Gothic fiction by discussing the ways in which both well known histories (such as Hume’s *The History of England*, 1754–62) and lesser known historical works (such as Paul M. Rapin de Thoyras’s *History of England*, 1721–31) influenced and shaped the genre. Arguing that the French Revolution destabilised Enlightenment notions of historical understanding, it goes on to examine the implications of the events taking place in France for history and Gothic pasts. Tracing the development of the Gothic in chronological order, this thesis encompasses both well- and lesser-known novels. As well as discussing authors such as Horace Walpole and Ann
Radcliffe, this project breaks from familiar critical histories of the genre by devoting chapters to Clara Reeve and Sophia Lee, important women writers whose works are often ignored or marginalised in discussions of the genre’s genesis. By charting the Gothic’s complex reaction to Enlightenment conceptions of the past and contemporary anxieties, this thesis challenges and broadens our current picture of the genre’s historical, political, social, and aesthetic agenda. The Gothic emerges and develops at a time when historical writing was undergoing major changes. In order to fully understand the genre’s attitude towards history, it is requisite to situate the Gothic within the wider changes taking place in eighteenth-century historical writing. In terms of the evolution and popularity of history in the eighteenth century, the Gothic emerges at a very telling moment. Although many types of histories were published at this time, including historical biographies, ecclesiastical histories and studies of particular reigns or events, histories of England were by far the most common. Given their popularity and their implications for Gothic fiction, my discussion will concentrate primarily on general histories of England. The following section is not designed to provide a comprehensive account of the development of historical writing prior to the emergence of Gothic fiction; rather, it focuses on the changes in historical works that have significant implications for the Gothic pasts discussed in this thesis.

ENLIGHTENMENT: HISTORIES OF ENGLAND AND THE CHANGING NATURE OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY HISTORIOGRAPHY

Throughout the eighteenth century, history was considered one of the noblest forms of literature and its value and literary status were unquestioned. In the first half of the century, attitudes towards history were largely derived from those of continental Renaissance humanism. Classical historians such as Livy, Cicero, Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Polybius, Sallust and Tacitus were held in high esteem and it was the aim of English historians to imitate their rhetorical eloquence. The main function of history in this period was not so much to (re)discover the past, but to use it as a vehicle for moral and social improvement in the present. As Laird Okie points out, history was designed to encourage readers to emulate past heroes, arouse affection for their ancestors and country, provide diversion, reveal how God manifests himself in the affairs of humanity, supply shining examples of virtuous conduct, and afford instruction for professional men (1991, 8). For example, in his Letters on the Study and Use of History (written in the 1730s but not published until 1752), Henry Bolingbroke transmitted the message of Tacitus and Seneca
by emphasising the didacticism of historiography and arguing that history is ‘philosophy teaching by examples’ (1752, 48). History in this period depended more on the way it was told rather than on accurate scholarship. There was generally less hands-on research with primary texts, little concern with the role of the self in historical writing and few reservations about judging the past by the standards of the present. Late Renaissance history frequently consisted of annals, compilations and chronologies, and scholars often did not distinguish between the primary sources and the finished work of historical writing. As Rosemary Sweet notes, the ‘Ciceronian dictum that history only dealt with those things worthy of recollection—what would now be considered as high politics—was still largely unchallenged in the early eighteenth century’ (2004, 3). During the first quarter of the eighteenth century, the Battle of the Books had largely been lost by the Ancients and, even though its effects continued to be felt, the models used to write history became increasingly Modern or neo-classicist. Furthermore, as Okie points out, the ‘Augustan age coincided with the early Enlightenment’ (1991, 2), and, in contrast to their predecessors, historians influenced by Enlightenment doctrines became more concerned with methodology, source-criticism and narrative structure.

The Enlightenment was, to use David Williams’s words, a ‘unique product of various national Enlightenments’ (1999, 1). However, even though the Enlightenment was a diverse rather than unitary movement, its adherents were joined together by a commitment to ‘modernize’ (Porter 2000, xxii). Its advocates prized reason and scientific method, were committed to demystification, debunking tradition and ‘clear[ing] away the darkness of ignorance, intolerance and prejudice,… [in order to] move towards a just and better life’ (Day 1996, 64). Such Enlightenment characteristics became an integral part of eighteenth-century historical writing, particularly by the mid-century. The age of Enlightenment (or philosophical) history was dawning. As the century progressed, there was a growing frustration with the state of English historical writing and the fact that a history of England worthy of comparison with the ancient historians had not been written. Historians (and philosophers) who were influenced by Enlightenment doctrines addressed this problem. Even though the historiography of the ancients remained important, such histories represented a significant departure from previous historical works. Despite its variety and numerous guises, Enlightenment historical writing has a number of distinguishing characteristics. Whereas traditional humanist history was written, in part, to reveal the workings of divine providence, Enlightenment history rejects the providentialist view of history which saw the narrative of the past as the unfolding of a divine plan. Rather
than simply recording great deeds, such historical writing develops a ‘more reflective understanding of the operation of society and its political forms, and the relationship between commerce, economy and political order’ (Sweet 2004, 4). Works of history influenced by the Enlightenment are not written around the actions of a single protagonist and are not concerned with the politics of a single country. Indeed, such histories have a cosmopolitan outlook and are interested in the general laws of historical development common to all societies. A particularly notable characteristic of histories which embrace Enlightenment doctrines is a commitment to notions of progress and the ‘teleology of civility’ (Pittock 2007, 262). As William Robertson’s epigraph to this chapter reveals, philosophical historians treasured the present moment above all else and were quick to repress or mock the barbarism of previous ages. The follies of the past are condemned while the emergence of reason and learning out of medieval savagery and superstition are celebrated. In accordance with Enlightenment doctrines, liberty of conscience and religious toleration are lauded, while superstition, ignorance and frivolous theology are denounced (Hicks 1996, 179). In the spirit of the Enlightenment, Protestantism is presented as progressive and enlightened, whereas Roman Catholicism is denounced as oppressive and backward. Throughout this thesis, historical works that exhibit such characteristics will be referred to as Enlightenment histories. In the eighteenth century, Edward Gibbon’s *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–81) and the historical works of numerous Scottish intellectuals such as Robertson, Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith exhibited such attitudes. In terms of histories of England, however, such characteristics are evident in Hume’s *The History of England* and, to a certain extent, Rapin’s national history.

As Okie notes, Rapin’s *History of England* ‘commingled traditionalist elements of the compilation-chronicle mode with a more modern Enlightened approach’ (1991, 61). Rapin, a French Protestant who lived in England and the Netherlands, began writing his *Histoire d’Angleterre* in 1707 and continued writing until 1724 when he was interrupted by illness. He died a year later and his completed work was published in The Hague in 1727. The work was made familiar to English readers by Nicholas Tindal’s extremely popular translation of Rapin’s work. Entitled the *History of England*, it was published in octavo volumes between 1721 and 1731. As Okie points out, Rapin provided new possibilities for history by undermining the traditional chronicle-compilation form of historical writing and effectively ‘set the standard for British historical scholarship in the age of [Robert] Walpole’ (1991, 47). Introducing many of the characteristics associated with Enlightenment historiography, Rapin’s *History of England* consults a wider range of
sources than its predecessors, interprets facts rather than lists them, treats sources critically and sceptically, and employs an increasingly secular tone. As Chapter 3 shows, the secularisation of the historical cause has a number of implications for Gothic fiction. Paving the way for Enlightenment historiography, Rapin shuns military history and significantly broadens the scope of historical enquiry by discussing social and economic factors. For Rapin, the main prerequisites for writing history are common sense, rationality and honesty. As Hicks points out, Rapin had little intention of imitating the classical historians; he complained to readers about the vagueness of classical protocols for writing history and rejected the necessity of conforming to ancient ideals (1996, 149). Whilst Rapin does acknowledge classical historians such as Tacitus, he largely decided to pursue his own agenda (H 1: xvi). However, as Chapter 3 discusses, arguing that English liberty could be traced back to the Saxon constitution and citing the late origins of the House of Commons, it was widely acknowledged that, despite its claim to rise above party politics, Rapin’s history had a clear Whig bias.

If Rapin represents something of a transitional figure in the history of eighteenth-century historical writing, Hume heralds the era of Enlightenment, or philosophical, history. His History of England was published between 1754 and 1762; the first volume covered the period 1603–49 and was followed by further volumes covering the sixteenth century, and two covering the period from Julius Caesar to Henry VII. Hume was initially known as a philosopher, but his multi-volume history met with great acclaim and established his reputation much more firmly than his philosophical works had done. Hume rejected the Whig bias of Rapin’s history and attempted to write a more objective history of England that transcended party politics. Characteristically of works influenced by Enlightenment thinking in this period, Hume strives for political detachment and neutrality. His history is interested in the socio-economic factors that drive the historical process and is committed to studying societies in a comparative and cosmopolitan manner. He is quick to mock the follies of previous ages and repress violent incidents, employing a confident and judicious tone to do so. Governed by reason, Hume’s work of Enlightenment history is written on a grand scale and sees history as the result of a relationship between cause and effect. Moreover, as Chapter 2 of this thesis reveals, The History of England can be viewed as an extension of Hume’s philosophical work and a study of the science of man underpins his historical project. Although Hume is indebted to the ‘manner of the Ancients’ (Hume 1932, 1: 170) and shared their view that history should have a didactic purpose, his historical work is profoundly “modern” and represents something of a
revolution in eighteenth-century historical thought. As Sweet notes, ‘famously associated with Voltaire and his *Essai sur les moeurs*, but also characterised by the histories of David Hume or William Robertson’, works of history underpinned by Enlightenment theories influenced ‘to a greater or lesser extent the majority of narrative histories of Britain which were published in the second half of the century’ (2004, 3–4).

Indeed, Rapin’s proto-Enlightenment and Hume’s Enlightenment histories of England are particularly notable for their commitment to explanatory narrative. As Okie points out, by the middle of the eighteenth century, England had ‘witnessed a major transformation in historical writing from the traditional humanist chronicle of the Renaissance to an essentially modern style of historical narrative’ (1991, vii). Works of history influenced by the Enlightenment are notable for their improved readability. Rapin’s history is certainly an example of a narrative history, but Hume criticised his ‘despicable’ style and endeavoured to write a more elegant history of England (1932, 1: 179). Indeed, even though Hume’s history is written in a philosophical spirit and probes the causes and motives that underpin events, he is still committed to writing a narrative history which is accessible and one that has a commendable literary style. Rationalism and sober judgement may be the most prominent characteristics of *The History of England*, but Hume recognised that historical writing must also entertain: the ‘first Quality of an Historian is to be true & impartial; the next to be interesting’, he writes (1932, 1: 210). It was this emphasis on narrative, style and literary accessibility that helped to widen the readership and appeal of history in the eighteenth century, and which made such histories so popular. Rapin’s history enjoyed enormous success; Tindal’s edition was so prevalent that it became one of the most popular scholarly works of the eighteenth century. It was not until the publication of Hume’s *The History of England* in the 1750s that Rapin’s work of history fell out of fashion. In keeping with the wider aim of the Enlightenment, these histories were designed to make the past accessible to as many readers as possible. In contrast to the historiography of the ancients, history was no longer written and designed exclusively for politicians and the elite; it was increasingly written for a polite middle-class audience. Hume was particularly successful in aiming history at a new female audience. ‘There is nothing which I would recommend more earnestly to my female readers than the study of history’, he writes, ‘as an occupation, of all others, the best suited both to their sex and education, much more instructive than their ordinary books of amusement, and more entertaining than those serious compositions, which are usually to be found in their closets’ (Hume 1854, 508). Hume’s *The History of England* took history to unprecedented levels of
popularity. With seven complete editions during his lifetime and one hundred and seventy-five in the century after his death, Hume’s multi-volume work became the definitive version of England’s past until the publication of Thomas Macaulay’s *History of England* (1849–61) in the mid-nineteenth century (Wootton 1993, 285). Other British works of Enlightenment history also enjoyed great success. Robertson achieved fame with his *History of Scotland*, and Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall* would become one of the most successful histories of all time. History was not a distinct discipline in the eighteenth century and, in terms of the literary marketplace, historical works were in competition with the novel and striving for a central role in contemporary culture.

LITERATURE, HISTORY AND THE RISE OF THE GOTHIC NOVEL

The historian and the novelist obviously occupy different positions. In the eighteenth century, there was an assumption that literature was about things that had not happened, whereas history was concerned with things that had. Literature was about imagination and invention whereas history was about telling the truth. As Hume’s intentions in *The History of England* attest to, historians were supposed to write about “facts” and, using increasingly scientific methods governed by reason and designed to probe the past with a new degree of objectivity, distinguish fiction from myth. However, as Walpole’s epigraph to this chapter suggests—that there is not ‘much difference’ between history and romance (1937–83, 15: 173)—the relationship between the two is far more complicated than this simple opposition suggests. With Enlightenment works of history employing the narrative form, boundaries between history and literature were especially difficult to distinguish by the middle of the eighteenth century. As scholars such as Everett Zimmerman and Robert Mayer have shown by examining the works of canonical eighteenth-century authors, there is a complex interrelationship between literature and history in this period. Historians were utilising literary and narrative techniques from the novel to make their histories more appealing to general readers, while novelists frequently debated historical subjects and were involved in historical pursuits. Eighteenth-century writers predominantly associated with fiction often engaged in historical writing. For example, Oliver Goldsmith published his *History of England* in 1771, while Tobias Smollett’s *History of England* (1757–58) sold very well. A number of other popular writers, such as Jonathan Swift and Henry Fielding, experimented with historical writing in this period. Antiquarian works flourished in Britain in the eighteenth century. Studying history with particular attention to ancient objects, archives and manuscripts, antiquarians focused more on the empirical
evidence of the past than on historical narrative, context, or process. Publishing and corresponding in elaborate networks, antiquaries such as Richard Gough and William Stukeley were instrumental in reconstructing Britain’s past and laying solid foundations for history as a whole. Controversy surrounding the authenticity of James Macpherson’s “Ossian” poems (1761 onwards) and Thomas Chatterton’s “Rowley” works (which date from around 1764) blurred the boundary between history and fiction and truth and falsity, even further.

Moreover, many eighteenth-century novels are preoccupied with the nature of historical writing and knowledge. For example, the works of Fielding, Laurence Sterne, Charlotte Lennox and Tobias Smollet continually grapple with early notions of historical consciousness and understanding. As Chapter 4 discusses, Samuel Richardson’s immensely popular epistolary fiction raises interesting questions about time and the distance between the perceiving and narrating self. However, even though the nature of history is debated in such novels, very few choose historical settings for their narratives. As Anne H. Stevens points out, in the 1740s and 1750s, Fielding, Richardson and their imitators dominated the literary marketplace and the ‘historical settings of seventeenth-century romance were temporarily set aside in favour of modern day, middle-class English settings’ (2010, 35). ‘This period of the suspension of romance’, continues Stevens, ‘coincides with the period of the “rise of the novel,” where the novel is identified with contemporary settings and a rejection of romance features’ (35). However, with the Romantic Revival gaining force, and historical works enjoying great popularity in the literary marketplace by mid-century, writers of fiction became increasingly drawn to historical settings. Although his authorship of the work is contested, Thomas Leland’s Longsword, Earl of Salisbury (1762) is a notable example of a novel that elects for a medieval, rather than contemporary, setting. Leland was primarily known as a historian and antiquarian rather than a fictional writer, and his work is an attempt to blend the prestige of history with the novel. However, as Stevens notes (2010, 31), beyond a favourable review and a popular stage adaptation, Longsword did not enjoy widespread success. Indeed, it would be another antiquarian and historian who would successfully fuse the eighteenth-century novel with the past.

Capitalising on the popularity of modern histories underpinned by Enlightenment philosophy, and exploiting the fluid relationship between history and literature, Horace Walpole pioneered the Gothic genre with the publication of The Castle of Otranto on Christmas Eve, 1764. As Chapter 2 discusses, the first edition of Otranto was presented as
a discovered manuscript. By employing such a device, Walpole’s novel raises awkward questions about narrative history and the nature of historical knowledge. In the second edition of *Otranto*, the words ‘A GOTHIC STORY’ are printed on the title page (*O* 3). Before the publication of this work, Walpole was better known as an antiquarian, historian and son of the British Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole. His home at Strawberry Hill became famous for its gothic revival style of architecture and vast collection of antiquities. Given his interest in antiquity and history, it should come as no surprise that the past is a source of fascination in *Otranto*. Set in a foreign location and an obscure historical period, Walpole developed a number of themes and tropes that would make the Gothic such a recognisable genre. These include an obsession with history and historical artefacts, the device of the discovered manuscript, a haunted suit of armour, paranormal occurrences, Catholic superstition, an evil villain, dysfunctional families, female oppression, a mouldering castle, macabre pasts, ancestral portraits, irrational behaviour, fantastic coincidences, and scenes of sustained terror and suspense.

Walpole’s thoughts in the preface to the second edition of *Otranto* provide a particularly significant insight into the Gothic and its preoccupations. He describes the novel as ‘a new species of romance’ (*O* 13) and as ‘an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern’ (*O* 9). He adds that ‘in the former all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success’ (*O* 9). Arguing that the modern novel has ‘dammed up’ the ‘great resources of fancy’ by adhering too strictly to ‘common life’ and that ‘old romances’ do not depict accurate psychological states, he sets out to reinvent the romance in *Otranto* by finding a way to ‘reconcile the two kinds’ (*O* 9). He achieves this by combining the fantastic and macabre aspects of romance with the modern novel’s ability to depict realistic psychological states and responses to events (*O* 9–10). A key preoccupation of most romances, of course, is a focus on events that happened in the distant past. This is certainly the case with Walpole’s “updated” romance; he speaks of *Otranto* as an attempt to identify with the ‘actions, sentiments’ and ‘conversations’ of ‘ancient days’ (*O* 9). To a readership accustomed to narratives set in the present, *Otranto* marks the return of the past to the literary domain. Indeed, the vague, unspecific medieval historical setting of Walpole’s novel is particularly significant. Akin to the sinister past that returns in Walpole’s narrative, *Otranto* drags the “civilised” eighteenth-century back to the medieval and un-Enlightened past.
ENLIGHTENED PASTS VERSUS GOTHIC PASTS

Walpole’s *Otranto* transported its readers to a barbaric period ruled by primitive customs, ignorance and superstition: the material that Enlightenment historians tended to overlook. It is a longstanding contention that the Gothic is not simply a rejection of the Enlightenment, but a complex reaction to it.\(^{19}\) As I mentioned previously, the Enlightenment may have been a diverse and multi-national movement, but it united a number of common characteristics. Its adherents shared Immanuel Kant’s motto for the Enlightenment, ‘dare to know’, and aimed to transform ‘the invisible into the visible, the ineffable into the discursive, and the unknown into the known’ (Bronner 2004, 19). At the same time that the Enlightenment was challenging religious conceptions of the world and fundamentally changing perceptions of the past, present and future, the Gothic emerged. Embracing irrationality, mysticism and superstition and yet obsessed with legitimacy and the status quo, Gothic pasts have a complex relationship with Enlightenment doctrines. As Fred Botting notes, the Gothic ‘is a site of struggle between enlightened forces of progress and more conservative impulses to retain continuity’ (1996, 23). The Gothic texts under discussion in this thesis continually stage such conflicts. Carol Margaret Davison echoes Botting’s words when she contends that the Gothic is a ‘battleground bearing traces—among other things—of a momentous confrontation between Enlightenment and pre-Enlightenment belief-systems, ideas and values’ (2009, 40).

It is the intention of this thesis to show that there is also a complex interaction between the Gothic and Enlightenment conceptions of history in this period. The Gothic can be read as a reaction to the eighteenth-century’s ‘new-found confidence in the ability of man to understand the past, improve his present and establish a blueprint for his future’ (Williams 1999, 7). In a similar vein to Enlightenment historiography, some of the narratives discussed in this thesis express anti-Catholic sentiments and stage a movement from a primitive past to a more civilised present. Stevens goes so far as to suggest that the Gothic expresses ‘characteristic Enlightenment skepticism about the truth of historical accounts’ (2010, 33).\(^{20}\) However, at the same time that the Gothic seems to accord with the characteristics of such histories, it responds to the Enlightenment’s attempt to demythologise the past by delighting in superstition, the supernatural, irrationality and the inexplicable; aspects of the past that such historians deplore. Indeed, Gothic pasts evince ‘multiple and sometimes contradictory stand-points vis-à-vis the Enlightenment’ (Davison 2009, 45). As James Carson argues, ‘the Gothic novel is at once complicit with and critical of the Enlightenment conceived of as a contradictory ideological formation and intellectual
enterprise’ (1996, 265). The Gothic’s reaction to Enlightenment doctrines becomes more varied and complex as the genre develops. Walpole’s *Otranto* may exhibit anti-Catholicism, but, as the next chapter shows, it is predominantly a reaction to the ‘cold common sense’ that dominates explorations of the past in the eighteenth century (Walpole 1767). Chapter 3 shows how the next Gothic novel to be published after *Otranto*—Clara Reeve’s *The Old English Baron* (1778)—embraces images of darkness and light, stages a movement from a barbaric past to a more progressive future, and yet, at the same time, can be read as a response to the secularisation of history. Sophia Lee’s *The Recess* (1783–85) rejects nearly every aspect of Enlightenment historiography (see Chapter 4) while Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) demonstrates perhaps the most complex reaction to Enlightenment doctrines. As Chapter 5 shows, Radcliffe’s fictional past may embrace reason and ultimately dispel superstition, but it continually draws attention to aspects of the past that Enlightenment historiography ignores. Although there is a complex interplay between Enlightenment strategies of historical representation and the Gothic, the links between historians and Gothic writers uncovered in this thesis reveal that the genre is frequently hostile towards such representations of the past. While acknowledging instances where the Gothic accords with Enlightenment historical doctrines, this thesis is particularly interested in where the Gothic exploits its blind spots and deviates from such conceptions of the past. The Gothic is a heterogeneous genre in the eighteenth century, but the following characteristics apply—to greater and lesser extents—to all of the Gothic narratives discussed in this thesis.

As I mentioned earlier, the popular historical works of Rapin and Hume (as well as Robertson and Gibbon) forward an Enlightenment agenda by focusing on the development of civil society, and, in the latter’s case, by forwarding a science of man. The inevitable result of this representational strategy is that aspects of the past that do not conform with reason or the spirit of science are marginalised. This thesis contends that the Gothic reacts to Enlightenment history’s ‘propensity to exclusion’ by focusing on aspects of the past that defy reason and that ‘resist the effort to force the complexities of the past into a neat synthesis’ (Ankersmit 2001, 3). In keeping with the Gothic’s contradictory relationship with Enlightenment doctrines, even novels which do eventually provide neat explanations for the past and feature harmonious endings (namely, *The Old English Baron* and *The Romance of the Forest*) still point to aspects of history that challenge rational comprehension. The Gothic is not concerned with accurately reconstructing historical periods. Even though Reeve’s and Lee’s Gothic novels are set in specific historical periods
and involve a number of events from recorded history, their novels are not designed to challenge historians’ accounts of these proceedings. As this thesis demonstrates, at the same time that the Gothic is intricately connected with the history of the eighteenth century, it exploits the blurred relationship between literature and history in order to question the extent to which we can know and understand the past. In all of the novels discussed in this thesis, the Gothic haunts Enlightenment historiography; it exploits its insecurities, plagues its vulnerabilities, and imaginatively provides fictional presences for its many absences and omissions. In the works discussed in this thesis, the Gothic frequently undermines the confidence exuded by Enlightenment historians. Hayden White’s thoughts on the relationship between literature and history are useful here. Exploring sinister aspects of the past that remain outside the premise of Enlightenment historiography and drawing attention to our frustrated access to the past through fragmented manuscripts and decaying buildings, the Gothic qualifies Enlightenment explanatory power by reminding readers that history is a ‘discourse’ rather than ‘an absolute ground of being, an objective process, or an empirically observable structure of relationships’ (White 1987, 103). Preying on notions of authenticity and exploiting the tenuous relationship between history and fiction in the eighteenth century, the Gothic serves as a timely reminder that history is the study of the past, not the past itself, and exposes the ‘irreducible and inexpungeable element of interpretation’ that is part of all historical narratives (White 1985, 51). At a time when the eighteenth century felt confident about its ability to master the past, the Gothic—a genre shot through with pro- and anti-Enlightenment impulses—emerged as a chilling reminder that our relationship with the past is often anything but comfortable and straightforward.

Reminiscent of Davison’s earlier quotation, even in works that exhibit historical attitudes associated with the Enlightenment, the Gothic continually harks back to pre-Enlightened conceptions of the past. The Age of Reason is haunted by the spectre of the Gothic. One of the reasons the Gothic endured throughout the eighteenth century (and well beyond) is because it continually questions what it is to be human and preys on primeval anxieties and fears. Gothic works raise disturbing questions about our relationship with history, the persistence of the past in the present and the role of divine agency in human life. The suspense-driven novels discussed in this thesis show that there is something inherently “Gothic” about our relationship with history: despite its seeming tangibility in the present, the past is always inherently inaccessible and beyond physical reach. Even in Reeve’s and Radcliffe’s novels where tidy resolutions are provided, the Gothic frequently
preys on our alien connection with the past. Whereas Enlightenment historiography gives
the impression that progress and rationality ultimately drive the historical process, the
Gothic shows how violence and irrationality frequently dictate the ruthless sweep of
history. The authoritative prose and neat narrative structures employed by Enlightenment
historians frequently mask our essentially remote connection with history. Drawing
attention to the haunting nature of history and aspects of it that transcend Enlightenment
historiography, the Gothic explores our most fundamental relationship with the past.

GOTHIC HETEROGENEITY: HISTORICAL DISPLACEMENT AND THE PAST AS
SUBTERFUGE

The attitudes towards history outlined above may be characteristic of a number of the
Gothic responses towards history discussed in this thesis, but it is important to recognise
the complexity and heterogeneity of Gothic pasts. While all of the novels discussed in this
thesis react to Enlightenment conceptions of history, they do so in very diverse ways and
take issue with different aspects of them. Furthermore, Gothic pasts themselves are sites of
intense conflict with authors frequently reacting to each others’ works. Throughout this
thesis, I will emphasise the genre’s instability, hybridity and contending ideologies. As
Carol Margaret Davison points out, at the same time that the Gothic is a ‘tradition with a
generic identity and significance with which… its foremost contributors consciously
dialogued’, there is also a ‘tremendous diversity’ in its manifestations (2009, 13).22 The
Gothic may be a recognisable genre, but it is not a homogeneous one that develops
unproblematically. Walpole may have fashioned many of the tropes that became the
hallmark of Gothic fiction and that were utilised by subsequent authors such as Reeve, Lee
and Radcliffe, but they would undergo significant revisions and be deployed for diverse
ends. As this thesis points out, within the Gothic genre itself, there are numerous different
strains, including Loyalist Gothic and Female Gothic. Still recognisable as works of Gothic
fiction, such sub-categories express different attitudes towards history, have conflicting
views on the genre’s themes and tropes and fiercely contest the meaning of the “Gothic” as
a political term (see Chapters 3 and 5). The Gothic writers discussed in this thesis set their
narratives in very different locations and historical periods and, as well as engaging in
debates surrounding history and the Enlightenment, express fears about a range of pressing
social, political and historical debates. The Gothic is often much closer to home than
general accounts of the genre suggest and, despite the seeming historical, and in some
cases, geographical, remoteness of such narratives, they frequently respond to and
comment on a number of eighteenth-century events. Gothic pasts may be linked with historical writing, but they are also intertwined with eighteenth-century history and culture. As the following chapters reveal, the Gothic undergoes a number of significant changes in the course of its development.

I have selected 1764, the publication date of the first Gothic novel, as the starting point for this thesis. However, it is important to note that developments in eighteenth-century verse, romance and criticism helped to shape the Gothic novel. The “Graveyard Poets” enjoyed great popularity in the first half of the century and contributed to the development of Gothic fiction by drawing on themes such as death, mortality, religion, melancholy and the supernatural. Thomas Parnell’s ‘Night-Piece on Death’ (1722), Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts* (1742–45), Robert Blair’s *The Grave* (1743), James Hervey’s *Meditations among the Tombs* (1745–47), Thomas Warton’s *The Pleasures of Melancholy* (1747) and Thomas Gray’s *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751) proved particularly influential and are frequently cited as important Gothic precursors. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 5, Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) influenced the Gothic by examining terror, awe, incomprehension and the irrational. Romances and revivals of “Celtic,” “Saxon” or “bardic” poetry by antiquarians were also popular and helped to shape the genre’s attitudes towards the past. Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), the work of “Ossian,” James Beattie’s *The Minstrel* (1770–74), Chatterton’s “Rowley” poems, John Carter’s *Specimens of Ancient Sculpture and Painting* (1780–94) and Joseph Riston’s collections of ancient poetry reveal a fascination with history and contribute to eighteenth-century attempts to reappropriate the past. As the century grew on, Gothic drama and musicals based on medievalist themes enjoyed great success. Novels of sentiment written by authors such as Henry Mackenzie and Richardson focused on the emotions of characters, recorded their feelings in minute detail and revealed their reactions to situations involving despair and anguish. As Chapter 4 discusses, this emphasis on psychology and passion had a large impact on the Gothic novel.

Another work which contributed to the cultural debates that led to the rise of the Gothic and the Gothic novel was Richard Hurd’s *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762). Criticising Augustanism and the realistic modern novel, he analyses the literature of the past, calling for the recovery of a native English tradition and urging a reconsideration of romance. Discussing Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, the verse epics of Tasso and Ariosto, and some of Shakespeare’s plays, he heralds the imaginative freedom of such works and argues
that “Gothic” (meaning, in this instance, medieval, or outside the classical domain) romances are a welcome alternative to the rigid neo-classical principles that dominate the first half of the eighteenth century. As my earlier discussion of the preface to the second edition of *Otranto* indicates, Walpole, similarly to Hurd, recognised the imaginative potential of romance and fused it with some of the features associated with the modern novel in order to write the first Gothic novel. The revival of romance and ancient forms of poetry proved vital to the rise of the Gothic novel, and also had a large influence on writers such as William Godwin and Walter Scott towards the end of the century. 24

However, this thesis is interested in works that are part of, rather an influence on, the Gothic tradition and focuses exclusively on the development of the Gothic novel in the eighteenth century. As the various reflections on historical understanding that feature in the novels of Fielding and Smollett suggest, the novel, with its emphasis on narrative, structure, interpretation and testimony, is useful for critiquing historiography and draws attention to the literary nature of history. This is even more so with the Gothic novel. Set in the past and replete with framing devices, fragmentation, conflicting testimonies, complex plots, coincidences and situations that frequently defy reason, the novels discussed in this thesis have profound philosophical implications for Enlightenment, narrative history and destabilise the traditional relationship between fact and fiction, history and romance. One might wonder why, in a thesis addressing the Gothic novel, I choose to focus on so few and at such length. There are three main reasons for this. Firstly, all of the Gothic novels discussed in this thesis have strong links to works of history influenced by Enlightenment doctrines and engage with Enlightenment conceptions of the past. As this thesis reveals, Walpole had read Hume’s *The History of England*, Reeve was influenced by Rapin’s *History of England* as a child and Lee’s novel, *The Recess*, engages explicitly with Hume’s (and, indeed, Robertson’s) history. Radcliffe was a Dissenting Unitarian and, as Chapter 5 reveals, her works are intertwined with Enlightenment notions of history and communicate with the historical debates that were triggered by the French Revolution (a series of events which were heavily influenced by Enlightenment doctrines). Secondly, whether it is Ellinor’s difficulty recalling past events in *The Recess*, or the decaying manuscript that is splintered throughout *The Romance of the Forest*, the novels discussed in this thesis problematise the nature of historical knowledge in both form and content. As well as challenging historical authenticity by masquerading as edited or translated works, Gothic novels frequently discuss (often explicitly) the complex issues that arise when it comes to writing the past. Thirdly, I have elected to devote the same time and space to each novel
under discussion. This ensures that each work has equal status and serves one of the main aims of this thesis: to show that authors who are often sidelined in histories of the Gothic novel (Reeve and Lee) are just as important and worthy of critical analysis as canonical writers (Walpole and Radcliffe).

Tracing the genesis of the Gothic in chronological order, this thesis begins with an examination of the Gothic’s engagement with Enlightenment history by examining the complex and often antagonistic relationship between Walpole’s *Otranto* and Hume’s *The History of England*. As Walpole’s correspondence reveals, he had read numerous volumes of Hume’s history before writing *Otranto* and did not think very highly of its content or the methods used to write it. Reassessing the significance of the Gothic in the eighteenth century, this chapter discusses the extent to which Walpole’s novel can be viewed as a bold response to, and critique of, Hume’s historiography. Focusing on the Gothic trope of the discovered manuscript, violence, textuality, language and the wider interrelationship between literature and history in the eighteenth century, answers to a number of key questions are sought. For example, why is *Otranto* seemingly fixated with a bygone age? Why is it so concerned with historical authenticity? What techniques does Walpole use to write the past and how do these compare with Hume’s methods? Taking into account a wealth of historical evidence, this chapter proposes that Walpole’s novel can be read as an imaginative revolt against Hume’s multi-volume work of history and that it marks the beginning of the genre’s contentious relationship with Enlightenment historiography and the philosophy that underpins it.

Building on the notion that the Gothic is shaped by (and can be read as a reaction to) Enlightenment historiography and shifting conceptions of the past in the eighteenth century, Chapter 3 proposes that *The Old English Baron* can be understood as a response to a popular (and frequently neglected) work of proto-Enlightenment English history that Reeve was very familiar with: this was Tindal’s translation of Rapin’s *History of England*. Focusing on this previously ignored relationship, the chapter considers the religious and political implications of Rapin’s *History of England* for the Gothic past presented in Reeve’s novel. Furthermore, in this chapter, I reveal the ways in which the past constructed in *The Old English Baron* can be read as a rewriting of *Otranto* and draw attention to the historical specificity that Reeve introduces to the genre at this time. As Chapter 2 notes, even though Walpole was the son of the Prime Minister and a Whig MP, it is difficult to read his politics into the foreign and Catholic past constructed in *Otranto*: a novel that is written largely in defiance of politics, philosophy, history and mainstream eighteenth-
century literature. The Gothic works which follow *Otranto* have clearer political standpoints and can be linked more accurately with their authors’ religio-political orientations and, as a result, the scope of this thesis broadens from this point onwards.

Focusing on Reeve’s Old Whig political beliefs and the English setting of her novel, I assess the extent to which *The Old English Baron* conveys Whig historico-political nightmares and focus on how her Gothic past betrays contemporary anxieties. Concurring with James Watt’s view that Reeve’s novel is a work of Loyalist Gothic fiction, this chapter shows how *The Old English Baron* subverts the Walpolean Gothic and responds to the Enlightenment drive to secularise the historical cause.

Influenced by Reeve’s use of history in *The Old English Baron*, the Gothic continued to be concerned with the events of recorded history. Lee’s *The Recess* is based around Queen Elizabeth’s persecution of Mary, Queen of Scots, and the isolation of her two daughters by a secret marriage. The novel bears close resemblance to parts of Hume’s *History of England* and Robertson’s *The History of Scotland* and it is likely that it was influenced by these two popular historical works. *The Recess* marks a significant contrast with previous Gothic narratives in that it is narrated predominantly in the first person by the novel’s protagonists, Matilda and Ellinor. Emphasising the diversity of the Gothic genre in the eighteenth century, this chapter argues that Lee hijacks certain themes from Walpole and Reeve to write a prototypical Female Gothic novel. Continuing to read the Gothic as a reaction to eighteenth-century historical writing, this chapter contends that Lee focuses on female protagonists and employs Gothic plotlines to critique the male codes of historical representation that govern Hume’s Enlightenment historiography. Developing arguments from the previous chapter, I show how, in the hands of female writers, Gothic pasts often express contemporary fears and anxieties, and comment on gender politics in the eighteenth century. Drawing on Gary Kelly’s notion that the Gothic enabled women to access the male-dominated realms of history and politics (2002, 1: xxix), I contend that Lee’s historically based novel utilises Gothic tropes such as concealed writings and a focus on the law to present a nightmare vision of women’s historical and social plight in the eighteenth century. Examining the complex structure of *The Recess*, I conclude by examining the extent to which Lee “Gothicises” the eighteenth-century epistolary form, and what the novel says about the nature of the past.
THE ENLIGHTENMENT, THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND THE GOTHIC

Although the nature of the past was debated throughout the eighteenth century, it became a subject of even more intense debate in the 1790s. The speed, scale and intensity of the French Revolution was unprecedented in human history. In just a few short years, the monarchy that had ruled France for centuries was overthrown and a new social order based on Enlightenment principles of citizenship was established. Looking on from English shores, there was general amazement at the scale and dizzying pace of events taking place in France. At the same time that events in France were influenced by Enlightenment philosophy, Enlightenment historical theories struggled to explain such developments. Historical discussion moved from multi-volume tomes to political pamphlets. Engaging with events in France and forwarding their own social and political views, writers such as Edmund Burke and Mary Wollstonecraft present conflicting views of history and debate the role of the past in the present. As I discuss in Chapter 5, feelings, romance and contested notions of the political term “Gothic” become important aspects of historical thought at this time.

Re-evaluating the implications of the French Revolution for Gothic fiction, Chapter 5 examines representations of the past in a novel that is often neglected in Gothic studies: Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest*. Written in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution, but set in seventeenth-century Roman Catholic France, I discuss the ways in which the novel bears traces of the present and examine the significance of the decaying abbey and fragmented manuscript that feature in the novel. Citing the enormity of the events taking place in France and the challenge they presented to established Enlightenment historical theories and methods, I argue that *The Romance of the Forest* responds to such shifting notions of history by revealing a heightened sense of historical consciousness that is engendered by the French Revolution. Influenced by *The Recess* and utilising the Female Gothic’s focus on the heroine, I show how Radcliffe’s novel engages with the politics of the past and, more specifically, with the contested “Gothic” views of history presented in Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) and Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790). Drawing attention to Radcliffe as a Rational Dissenter, her links to Burke and the renewed significance of the sublime in the Romantic period, this chapter considers the extent to which the past in *The Romance of the Forest* is shaped by the chaotic events of the early 1790s.

Discussing the insatiable British thirst for Gothic novels as the French Revolution consumed itself in the Terror, the Afterword, which is the final section of my thesis, argues
that Gothic pasts continue to be influenced by the events taking place in France; whether it is
the thematic associations manifest in Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), or
the mob violence that features in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796). The main purpose of
this Afterword, however, is to draw attention to the Gothic’s historical trajectory in the
eighteenth century. The novels discussed in this thesis reveal that the Gothic moves
forward in history, from *Otranto’s* focus on an (approximately) eleventh-century historical
setting to the seventeenth-century past of Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest*. Indeed,
the Gothic comes forward in time earlier than existing scholarship suggests. The date range
of this thesis (1764–1794) differs from many other works of scholarship, and this is due to
one of its central contentions: that the French Revolution changed the nature of history and
Gothic pasts forever. With the Revolution in France turning violent, the French declaring
war on Britain and the British government implementing widespread oppressive legislation
to curb revolutionary activity, I argue that the present had become a far more frightening
place than the past and became an alternative setting for tales of terror. For example,
Radcliffe’s *The Italian* (1797) is set just a few years before her own time, whilst William
Godwin’s *Things as they Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) and Mary
Wollstonecraft’s *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria* (1798) bring the Gothic (and the
politics that had always formed part of it) to bear on the eighteenth century. This thesis
concludes by arguing that, even though tales of terror no longer relied on historical
displacement, Gothic attitudes towards the past continued to be influenced by the genre’s
earlier contentious relationship with Enlightenment historiography.

Notes

1. Whilst psychoanalytic criticism has traditionally dominated Gothic studies and remains a prevalent
aspect of contemporary criticism, there has been an increasing focus on historical readings over the last
decade or so. Notable examples of this approach include Maggie Kilgour’s *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*
(1995) and Robert Mighall’s *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction* (1999). In recent years, Andrew
Smith’s *Gothic Studies* (2007) and Carol Margaret Davison’s *Gothic Literature 1764–1824* (2009) conduct a
number of historically based readings.

2. In *British Historical Fiction before Scott* (2010), Anne H. Stevens briefly considers the relationship
between Gothic and historical pasts (48–50) and discusses Walpole’s *Otranto*, Reeve’s *The Old English
Baron* and Lee’s *The Recess*. However, as the title of her study suggests, Stevens is more interested in how
the Gothic helped to shape the historical novel and is not primarily interested in the Gothic’s complex
relationship with eighteenth-century historiography. In his introduction to *Varieties of Female Gothic* (2001),
Gary Kelly also briefly considers the influence of aspects of Enlightenment historiography on the Gothic (1:
xxiii–xxix).
3. For a discussion of the broader and more diverse changes taking place to historical writing in this period, see Thomas Peardon’s *The Transition in English Historical Writing 1760–1830* (1933), Mark Salber Phillips’s *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740–1820* (2000) and Joseph M. Levine’s *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (1991).

4. Despite the quantity and variety of historical works produced in this period, there was a widespread recognition amongst intellectuals that there was not a narrative history of England written to ‘the Olympian standards of the inventors of “history,” the ancient historians of Greece and Rome’ (Hicks 1996, 1). France and Italy possessed ‘neoclassical’ historians comparable to those of antiquity, but, as the Earl of Orrey points out, England ‘still remains defective in excellent historians’: we have ‘had a Locke, a Newton, and a Dryden’, he adds, ‘but we cannot boast a Livy, a Thucydides, or a Tacitus’ (quoted in Hicks 1996, 1). As Philip Hicks points out (1996, 1), intellectuals as diverse as Bacon, Milton, Clarendon, Dryden, Addison, Bolingbroke, Voltaire and Montesquieu all voiced their displeasure at the fact that England did not have a narrative history written in a grand, majestic manner and containing political deeds, military activity and character sketches for which the classical historians were famous. The aim was not to write a history of the classical period, but to produce a modern history of England that accorded with the conventions of the classical historians. The publication of the Earl of Clarendon’s *History of the Rebellion* (1702–4)—a work of historiography modelled after Thucydides—went some way to achieving this and was well received. However, Clarendon had only achieved acclaim with one period of English history, the Civil War of the 1640s, and English critics still longed for a (neoclassical) account of England’s entire past. In a strange twist of fate, it would be two outsiders influenced by Enlightenment doctrines—Rapin and Hume—who would successfully address the perceived “weakness” of English historical writing.

5. For a thorough discussion of the persistence and assimilation of classical ideas in modern historical works, see Hicks’s *Neoclassical History and English Culture: From Clarendon to Hume* (1996). See my note below for the influence of ancient historians on Hume.

6. For more information on the cosmopolitanism of histories influenced by the Enlightenment, see Karen O’Brien’s *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (2005).

7. Besides Hume’s history, the historical works of a number of other Scottish intellectuals trace human development ‘through certain common stages of progress from barbarism to refinement’ and dismiss much of the past as mere savagery and superstition (Cannon 1988, 201). In his *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (1752–64)—the ideas of which were fundamental to the later *Wealth of Nations* (1776)—Smith develops a four stage theory of history whereby all societies pass through the following universal historical stages: the hunting stage, the age of shepherds, the age of agriculture and the commercial stage. Smith’s historical ideas proved very influential. Developing Smith’s work, Dugald Stewart came up with the idea of theoretical, or conjectural, history in order to address the problem of how we can ‘conjecture historical change for which no evidence exists by examining the same stage in development for a society where the evidence does exist’ (Pittock 2007, 263). Based on the widespread Enlightenment notion that human nature is essentially the same everywhere at all times, Robertson utilised conjectural history in his analysis of Native Americans in his *History of America* (1777). Smith’s historical ideas also influenced John Millar, Lord Kames and Adam Ferguson, who shared Smith’s view that social progress is often accompanied by a backward step. For further
discussion of Scottish intellectual history, see Murray G. H. Pitttock’s ‘Historiography’ (2007) and Alexander

8. Tindal’s translation of Rapin’s history surpassed all previous general histories and English readers
expressed begrudging praise for the Frenchman’s achievement. ‘It is somewhat surprising’, wrote one
English critic, ‘that the only account of the English affairs which deserves the name of a history should be
writ by a foreigner’ (Duncombe 1728, 1).

9. Hicks argues that Rapin ‘denied the necessity of following received opinion regarding the writing
of history. He did list Caesar, Livy, and Tacitus as having the sort of taste historians required… but Rapin
decided to press on according to his own lights’ (1996, 149).

10. As Chapter 2 makes clear, Hume was well known as a philosopher before he started writing
history. Publishing works such as *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40), *An Enquiry concerning Human
Understanding* (1751) and *The Natural History of Religion* (1757), Hume was recognised not only as an
important and influential philosopher (and, later, historian), but was a very controversial figure. Throughout
his life, he was accused of heresy and conflict as a result of his disobedience in light of religion. For more
information on the reception of Hume’s work in Britain and Europe, see Peter Jones’s *The Reception of

11. As Hick’s notes, even though Hume observed ‘ancient protocols for historical writing’, *The
History of England* was modern and ‘revolutionary in its treatment of many religious and constitutional
issues’ (1996, 170). Influenced by the ancients, Hume’s work of history functions as a teacher of moral and
political lessons, but many of his ‘particular lessons were those commonly associated with the program of the
Enlightenment’ (179).

12. Robertson’s *History of Scotland* is particularly significant in the sense that it was written for the
general public. As Peardon notes, he presented his history (and his many other Enlightenment-influenced
historical works) in ‘a straightforward narrative without too much encumbrance of academic digression,
technical discussion or quotations from documents, and added a concluding section of “proofs and
illustrations” devoted to such matters’ (1933, 23). Works of history influenced by the ethos of the
Enlightenment became increasingly accessible and readable. The most stylistically accomplished historical
work published in the eighteenth-century was Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall*. Sharing the characteristics of
numerous works of history influenced by the Enlightenment in this period—a denunciation of religious
tyranny, an examination of the causes that underpin events and a persuasive narrative tone—it was an
immediate bestseller. Although Gibbon’s history was immensely successful, its influence on Gothic fiction is
difficult to assess for two main reasons: firstly, the first volume was published twelve years after Walpole
pioneered the Gothic genre and, secondly, there is a lack of historical links between Gibbon’s history and the
Gothic authors discussed in this thesis. For a consideration of some of the ways in which Gibbon’s *Decline
and Fall* may have influenced the Gothic, see Robin Sowerby’s ‘The Goths in History and Pre-Gothic
Gothic’ (2000).

13. Discussing the works of authors such as Jonathan Swift, William Godwin, Richardson and
Fielding, Everett Zimmerman’s *The Boundaries of Fiction: History and the Eighteenth-Century British Novel*
(1996) argues that novels in this period are concerned with the epistemological problems of historical
writing. His study focuses on the ways in which the novel critiques the manner in which historiography makes claims about the past and pays particular attention to the tendency of novelists to entitle their works as histories and to present them as pseudo-documentary “evidence” presented by pseudo-editors. In *History and the Early English Novel: Matters of Fact from Bacon to Defoe* (1997), Robert Mayer explores the complexity of the relationship between history and fiction and argues that the English novel originates from historical writing.

14. Aware of the success of the novel, histories written in this period were influenced by literary techniques used by novelists and the sentimental movement. In *Society and Sentiment*, Philips argues that sentiment became integral to historiography and shows how, throughout the century, history broadened its appeal beyond politics and frequently paralleled developments in the contemporary novel. In *Narratives of Enlightenment* (2005), O’Brien also notes the literary aspects of Hume’s and Robertson’s histories and shows how their historical works sometimes make use of a sentimental historical style. While sentiment most certainly does influence parts of Hume’s and Robertson’s works, their histories are still largely governed by reason, measured prose and a deliberate detachment and emotional distance from the historical events being described.

15. As Okie notes, Goldsmith’s and Smollet’s works were ‘popularizations of English history’ which proved to be ‘enormously successful and remunerative ventures’ (1991, 9). However, Goldsmith’s and Smollet’s historical works do not present original contributions to historiography and, therefore, neither are discussed in this thesis. Smollet’s instalments of his *History of England* sold 10–20,000 copies a week, but, as Peardon points out, it was ‘merely a rapid compilation written as a commercial venture to rival Hume’ and was ‘long used as a supplement’ to the latter’s *The History of England* (1933, 77). Goldsmith’s *History of England, from the earliest times to the death of George II* proved very popular, but he admits to ‘abridging the works of others’ (1771, 1: i) in the preface and the Elizabethan section of his work is taken almost directly from Hume. He also published *A History of England in a Series of Letters from a Nobleman to his Son* anonymously in 1764.

16. Okie notes that it is ‘striking how many of the literary titans of the age dabbled in history, although their endeavors were frequently never completed or published’ (1991, 8). Such writers include Daniel Defoe, Swift, Fielding, Samuel Johnson and Edmund Burke. Swift wrote abstracts for a general history of England while Fielding—a friend of the historian James Ralph—was an ‘avid reader of English history and imbued his fiction with profound historical insight’ (Okie 1991, 8–9).

17. As Rosemary Sweet notes, the relationship between the antiquary and the historian was ‘always more complicated than a simple opposition between narrative and description’. History may have been regarded in much higher esteem than mere antiquities in the eighteenth century, but, nevertheless, the ‘historian used the evidence of the antiquary, and the antiquary depended upon the historical narrative of the historian to provide the framework according to which the artefacts of the past could be interpreted’. They were, Sweet adds, ‘natural partners, a fact to which their frequent titular pairing is sufficient testimony’ (2004, 1–2). For more information on the complex (inter)relationship between history and antiquarianism, see Sweet’s *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2004).
Eighteenth-century novels frequently take issue with narrative histories. For example, in the opening pages of *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753), Smollet questions the accuracy of historical writing and questions notions of ‘historical truth’ (1990, 45). Indeed, featuring extreme situations and a graveyard scene including a phantom, *Ferdinand Count Fathom* is seen as an important precursor to the Gothic. For a brief overview of the early origins of Gothic fiction (including a discussion of Graveyard Poetry, sentimentalism and the sublime), see Punter’s *Literature of Terror* (1: 20–53).

This thesis focuses primarily on the Gothic’s reaction to notions of Enlightenment historiography and, therefore, aside from the discussion provided here, it is beyond the scope of this introduction to discuss the Gothic’s relationship with the Enlightenment in detail. For a good overview of this subject, see Davison’s *Gothic Literature* (2009, 22–54). My brief consideration of the Enlightenment and the Gothic here synthesises a number of opinions and views outlined in Davison’s account (40).

Stevens’s observation is a valid one. However, as Chapter 2 shows, Hume’s skepticism about our ability to know the past in *The History of England* is often obscured by his authoritative, persuasive narrative tone and strong conviction that the mysteries of the past can be solved by a strict adherence to reason.

Reeve’s and Lee’s novels do not aim to challenge historical accounts, but, by implication, they suggest that romances can provide valuable historical information and insight. This is particularly the case with Lee’s *The Recess* (see Chapter 4).

In *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict, 1764–1832* (1999), James Watt argues that the Gothic was ‘far less a tradition with a generic identity and significance than a domain which was open to contest from the first, constituted or structured by the often antagonistic relations between different writers and works’ (6). While Watt identifies the diversity of eighteenth-century Gothic—an important aspect of such fiction which this thesis develops—I concur with Davison’s counter-claim: that, despite its diversity, the Gothic is still a recognisable genre and one that its practitioners deliberately engaged with and debated. As this thesis makes clear, there may be very different variations within the Gothic genre itself, such as the Loyalist Gothic and the Female Gothic, but they are, nevertheless, still identifiable as works belonging to the hybridal literary tradition of the Gothic.

Similarly to the Gothic novel, English Gothic drama relied heavily on the supernatural and the spectacle of human suffering. Frequently set in castles, cemeteries, ruined abbeys, forests, mountains, or forbidding environments, Gothic theatre exploited lighting techniques, innovative staging methods, special effects and music to create suspense and attract large audiences. Arising in England roughly between 1789 and 1832, such dramas were often adaptations of Gothic novels. The first Gothic drama is, arguably, Horace Walpole’s *The Mysterious Mother* (1768). However, because the play dealt with incest, it was never performed; Walpole only circulated amongst close friends until the early 1790s. Notable Gothic plays of the 1770s and 1780s include Robert Jephson’s *Count of Narbonne* (an adaptation of *The Castle of Otranto* that was performed at Covent Garden in 1781), Richard Cumberland’s *The Mysterious Husband* (Covent Garden, 1782) and Miles Peter Andrew’s *The Enchanted Castle* (Covent Garden, 1786). However, as Jeffrey N. Cox argues, the ‘Gothic would become a truly powerful force on the London stage only after 1789, the year of the publication of Ann Radcliffe’s first novel, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, and of the fall of the Bastille’ (2002, 126). James Boaden adapted a number of Radcliffe’s novels for the stage, including *The Romance of
the Forest as Fontainville Forest (Covent Garden, 1794) and The Italian as The Italian Monk (Covent Garden, 1797). He also staged Matthew Lewis’s The Monk as Aurelio and Miranda (Drury Lane, 1798).

George Colman the Younger dramatised William Godwin’s Caleb Williams in The Iron Chest (Drury Lane, 1796), Benjamin West created a stage production of Charles Maturin’s Melmoth the Wanderer (Royal Coburg, 1823), and Richard Brinsley Peake adapted Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein as Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein (English Opera House, 1823). The popularity of such adaptations gave rise to many “original” works. Particularly noteworthy examples include William Sotheby’s Julian and Agnes (Drury Lane, 1801) and John Tobin’s The Curfew (Drury Lane, 1807). Gothic novelists also became popular for their dramatic works. For example, Matthew Lewis’s Castle Spectre (1798) was hugely successful and Charles Maturin was famed for his popular Bertram; or, The Castle of St. Aldobrand (Drury Lane, 1816). A number of women writers also produced Gothic dramas. Hannah Cowley’s Albina, Countess of Raimond (Haymarket, 1779), Joanna Baillie’s De Montfort (Drury Lane, 1800), Sophia Lee’s Almeyda, Queen of Granada (Drury Lane, 1796), Harriet Lee’s The Mysterious Marriage (1798) and Jane Scott’s The Old Oak Chest (Sans Pareil, 1916) are just a few examples of dramatic Gothic works written by women. Towards the end of the century, a number of Gothic dramas were produced by Romantic writers. Examples include Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s Remorse (Drury Lane, 1813), Lord Byron’s Manfred (1817) and Percy Bysshe Shelley’s The Cenci (1819). As Cox argues, the Gothic ‘remained the dominant form of serious popular drama until the rise of the domestic melodrama in the 1820s’ (127). For more information on Gothic drama, see Cox’s ‘English Gothic theatre’ (2002, 125–144).

24. Numerous works by Godwin and Scott reveal their interest in romance and the Gothic. Godwin published Imogen: A Pastoral Romance, From the Ancient British in 1784. This was an adaptation of Otranto and chronicles the abduction of the title character by the aristocratic villain, Roderic. Simiarly to Walpole, Godwin ‘offered his romance as a work which derived from a manuscript source, but he rewrote Otranto by forcing it into a far more obviously resonant political context’ (Watt 1999, 45). As Watt notes, set in primitive Wales, Imogen constructs an ‘image of pure, uncorrupted society in the mythical past, as a bulwark against the hegemonic forces of English imperialism’ (45). Godwin also wrote St Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century (1799), which utilises Gothic conventions and the supernatural. Although Walter Scott is most famous for historical novels such as Waverley (1814) and Rob Roy (1817), he had a keen interest in antiquity and was a collector of ballads and folk-legends. He contributed to Matthew Lewis’s collection of ballads, Tales of Wonder (1801), and penned two plays with identifiable Gothic elements, House of Aspen (1799) and Doom of Devrogoil (1817). He wrote three Gothic stories, ‘The Tale of the Mysterious Mirror’ (1828), ‘The Tapestried Chamber’ (1828) and ‘Wandering Willie’s Tale’, which features in Redgauntlet (1824). He also wrote Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft (1830), which condemns the witch-persecutions of the seventeenth century and questions historical belief in ghosts.
Featuring supernatural occurrences, family disputes, ancestral ambiguity, female persecution, superstitious beliefs, a castle with subterranean passages, scenes of suspense and terror, and a macabre history that returns to disrupt the present, Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* introduced a number of tropes that would feature prominently in future Gothic works. As Walpole’s epigraph to this chapter indicates, he was enthralled by the past and our relationship with it. His status as a wealthy aristocrat enabled him to pursue his interest in the past and his home at Strawberry Hill came to resemble a Gothic castle. Walpole was fascinated with medieval history and he was a keen historian and antiquarian. His Strawberry Hill mansion was filled with paintings and ancient artefacts, and he published a number of works with serious historical intent. However, as I will show in this chapter, Walpole’s engagement with the past in *Otranto* is more frivolous. He does not set out to challenge the historical accuracy of Enlightenment works of history such as Hume’s *The History of England*. Rather, *Otranto* cultivates an imaginative identification with the past, raises difficult questions about the nature of historical knowledge and exploits the blind spots of Enlightenment historiography to evoke suspense, fear and terror.

As I discussed in the Introduction, Hume’s *The History of England* exhibits many of the qualities associated with Enlightenment historiography and proved immensely successful throughout the eighteenth century. In very diverse ways, both Hume and Walpole were interested in re-configuring history for the demands of an increasingly historical age. The former employed rational narrative frameworks designed to produce a more objective account of England’s history while the latter let his imagination run riot and plundered the past for its creative potential. History and literature were closely intertwined in the eighteenth century but, with the emergence of *Otranto* two years after the publication of Hume’s final volume of *The History of England*, the relationship between
the two became even more convoluted. As I discuss in more detail later, Walpole’s letters reveal that he had a contentious relationship with Hume and that he was not fond of *The History of England*. Proposing that *Otranto* can be read as a rebellion against Hume’s historical philosophy, this chapter poses a number of questions. For example, to what extent can the novel be read as a reaction to the Enlightenment historical attitudes manifest in Hume’s *The History of England*? What is the significance of random occurrences in Walpole’s novel and what does *Otranto* say about our relationship with the past? Before answering these questions, it is necessary to thoroughly examine *The History of England* and the philosophy that underpins it.

CONTAINING THE PAST: HUME AND HISTORICAL FRAMEWORKS

Hume was a philosopher before he was a historian and, whether it is historiography or philosophy, all of his work is historical in the sense that it endeavours to trace effects to perceptible causes. From *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40) to *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) to *The History of England* (1754–62), Hume examines origins in an attempt to gain understanding and endeavours to banish ignorance by assigning causes to previously inexplicable phenomenon. Moreover, his philosophical works outline a variety of narrative strategies that he believes are not only essential for writers in general, but particularly for historians. Throughout his philosophical conjectures, Hume speaks of history as a ‘narrative composition’ (1826, 27). Less interested in the function of history than some of his contemporaries, he focuses on how the past comes to be written and is concerned with history as a specifically ‘literary problem’ (Braudy 1970, 32). Hume argues that, like all literary compositions, history must have ‘a design’: without one, a work would resemble ‘more the ravings of a madman’ than ‘the sober efforts of genius and learning’ (1826, 26). History must be contained by a narrative framework or an infrastructure that emphasises coherence and continuity. The ‘events or actions’ which a historian relates must be ‘connected together by some bond or tie’ which ‘may bring them under one plan or view’ (26). In the writing of history, Hume argues, this ‘connexion among several events’, the one that ‘unites them into one body’, is invariably the ‘relation of cause and effect’ (30). The ‘more unbroken’ the ‘chain’ of reasoning or causation the historian presents, the ‘more perfect is his production’ (27).

For Hume then, the chief purpose of historiography is to unearth lines of causation. Even seemingly ‘different and unconnected’ past events must be comprehended within a ‘design’ and traced from their origins to their ‘most remote consequences’ because,
‘amidst all their diversity’, they still share a ‘species of unity’ (27). This leads to another important aspect of Hume’s philosophy, and one that has fundamental implications for his historiography. Despite its evident scepticism, his philosophy is largely concerned with universalizability.5 In An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Hume declares that ‘there is a great uniformity among the actions of men, in all nations and ages’ and that ‘human nature remains still the same in its principles and operations’ (97). Since human nature is ‘uniform’, he posits, human action necessarily follows certain patterns. To use Terence Penelhum’s words (1993, 169), Hume’s philosophy implies that there is ‘a natural or usual course of behaviour’. Even when there are ‘seeming irregularities’ (in character or event), ‘internal motives’ may still ‘operate in a uniform manner’ (Hume 1826, 103). By ‘showing men in all varieties of circumstances and situations’ (98) within a coherent, causal, narrative framework, history should illuminate ‘secret springs and principles’ (27) and ultimately reveal ‘the constant and universal principles of human nature’ (98).

Such ideas pervade The History of England; a work that essentially represents an extension of Hume’s philosophical speculations. Written after the majority of his works of philosophy, Hume’s philosophical ideas not only inform and shape his multi-volume work of historiography, but are thoroughly tested, evaluated and altered. In contrast to his earlier works, Hume not only conjectures about matters of historical composition, but implements his philosophical ideas in The History of England. One does not have to read far into Hume's history to discover his continuing concern with organisational frameworks and patterns of human behaviour:

Most sciences, in proportion as they encrease [sic] and improve, invent methods by which they facilitate their reasonings; and employing general theorems, are enabled to comprehend in a few propositions a great number of inferences and conclusions. History…is obliged to adopt such arts of abridgment, to retain the more material events, and to drop all the minute circumstances, which are only interesting during the time, or to the persons engaged in the transactions. (HE 2: 3–4)

One such framework or ‘art of abridgment’ implemented in The History of England is character analysis. By implying that there is a relationship between personality and a broad range of public events, the analysis of ‘eminent personages’ (HE 5: 327) provides a form of causal explanation, at least in the Stuart volumes.6 For instance, ‘wild’ in his ‘conduct’ and ‘unrestrained either by prudence or principle’ (HE 6: 240), the Duke of Buckingham’s character is closely linked to his involvement in certain historical events. Without even considering alternative causes (such as social, political or contingent), Hume argues that it is Buckingham’s impulsiveness, his lack of ‘secrecy and constancy’, that destroys ‘his
character in public life’ \((HE\ 6:240)\). As Leo Braudy highlights \((1970, 46)\), Buckingham’s fiery nature is also somewhat overemphasised in his rivalry with Richelieu and for the cause of the brief England-France segment of the Thirty Years War.

In a similar fashion to Buckingham, Lord Ashley (also known as the Earl of Shaftesbury) is another figure who provides the ‘bond or tie’ that brings disparate events ‘under one plan’ \((Hume\ 1826, 26)\). One of ‘the most remarkable characters of the age’, Lord Ashley is portrayed as ‘the chief spring of all the succeeding movements’ \((HE\ 6:240)\). Possessing ‘furious passions’, a ‘sound judgement of business’ and an aptitude for subtle contrivance, Lord Ashley’s nature is closely allied with the ‘pernicious counsels’ and insidious schemes of the infamous Cabal \((HE\ 6:240–89)\). Indeed, in the Stuart volumes, character analysis provides a framework or design for containing the past and revealing the correlation between human nature and human action. Hume epitomises his own historiographical strategy when he declares that the ‘movements of great states are often directed by as slender springs as those of individuals’ \((HE\ 6:46)\). However, \textit{The History of England} is essentially a mélange of historiographical methods and, as is common with works written over a number of years, Hume’s techniques, aims and attitudes alter significantly; not only across the six volumes, but within individual volumes. Hume’s representation of Oliver Cromwell exemplifies the experimental nature of \textit{The History of England} and signifies a discontent with character as a mode of historiographical organisation.

Where Buckingham and Lord Ashley are represented as rather one-dimensional figures whose stormy natures are directly responsible for the outcome of certain historical events, Oliver Cromwell is presented as a dynamic man with both public and private identities. Conducting himself with great ‘regularity’ and ‘austerity of manners’ in court, he has a propensity for ‘unguarded play and buffoonery’ amongst his ‘friends’ \((HE\ 6:90–91)\). We learn that he has a ‘vein of frolic and pleasantry’, often amusing himself by ‘putting burning coals into the boots and hose of the officers’ that ‘attended him’ \((HE\ 6:90)\). Hume argues that such qualities make Cromwell a ‘singular personage’ and a rather ‘inconsistent’ character \((HE\ 6:90)\). Human nature as uniform and the cause of historical events is profoundly problematised. Hume’s desire to see mankind ‘the same, in all time and places’ lessens \((1826, 98)\). Cromwell’s conflicting selves lead Hume to contemplate the validity of character as a form of organisation in historical writing: he notes that Cromwell is capable of provoking both the most ‘extravagant panegyric’ and ‘most virulent invective’ \((HE\ 6:107)\) amongst historians. In his own historical account, Hume
does not attempt to resolve the paradoxical qualities of Cromwell’s character. He merely represents the disparate qualities of his character and leaves it for the reader to decide. As Braudy notes (1970, 56), the irregularities of Cromwell’s character cast Hume’s philosophical notions concerning the universalizability of human nature and behaviour into doubt.

The portrayal of Charles II casts further doubt on Hume’s earlier philosophical conjectures. ‘If we survey the character of Charles II in the different lights, which it will admit of’, writes Hume, ‘it will appear various, and give rise to different and even opposite sentiments’ (HE 6: 446). In contrast to the treatment of Cromwell’s character, Hume sees a need to contain Charles’s character in order to ensure a coherent narrative. ‘With a detail of his private life’, writes Hume, ‘we must set bounds to our panegyric on Charles’ (HE 6: 447). By volume five, Hume has almost entirely lost his faith in the relationship between human nature (cause) and human action (effect). Despite Charles I’s propensity for ‘hasty and precipitate resolutions’ (HE 5: 542), Hume does not see his personality as the reason for a series of ‘hostilities with Spain’ (HE 5: 354). Rather, Hume argues that antagonism between England and Spain ‘proceeded from the advice’ and ‘importunity of the parliament’ who deserted Charles ‘immediately after they had embarked him in those warlike measures’ (HE 5: 354). Indeed, human personality as a means of tracing lines of causation and unifying the vagaries of circumstance that is the past is radically undermined. Hume comes to believe that ‘character is not the only or even a major cause in history’ (Braudy 1970, 58).

In the Tudor and medieval volumes, Hume turns his back on the character-oriented conception of history almost entirely; history may be expressed through human nature, but it is not ultimately determined by it. Character becomes merely ‘one of the many causal streams in the flow of history’ (Braudy 1970, 64). The focus is now on the law. As Hume argues in his essay, ‘That Politics may be Reduced to a Science’, so ‘great is the force of laws’ that ‘consequences almost as general and certain may sometimes be deduced from them’ (1825, 13). Consequently, as Braudy points out (1970, 67), the Tudor and medieval volumes accentuate the formation and implementation of the law and attempt to place man within the infrastructure of law and time. For instance, Hume’s representation of Henry VII’s reign is permeated by the ‘many good laws’ that he ‘enacted for the government of his subjects’: from a ruling against ‘carrying off any woman by force’ to laws ‘against the exportation of money, plate, or bullion’ (HE 3: 74–77). At this stage of The History of England, Hume suggests that ‘the “real” theme of history is the working of law’ in each
period (Braudy 1970, 68). Discussing feudalism in volume one, Hume declares that ‘feudal law is the chief foundation, both of political government and of jurisprudence, established by the Normans in England’ (HE 1: 455). Feudal law is so important, argues Hume, that we must ‘form a just idea’ of it in order to explain the state not only of England, but ‘of all other kingdoms of Europe, which, during those ages, were governed by similar institutions’ (HE 1: 455). The law in effect becomes Hume’s latest infrastructure to connect diverse events and to ‘comprehend in a few propositions a great number of inferences and conclusions’ (HE 2: 3–4). In effect, what we have throughout The History of England is a quest for a narrative framework to contain and write the past. Elements that fit such infrastructures are kept, whilst elements that do not are omitted. Traditional forms of historiography (such as character analysis) are tried, tested, retained, modified or discarded whilst new forms (such as examinations of laws and the impact on lives) are developed and piloted. From a belief in a static historical reality, Hume eventually perceives the past as a kinetic ‘collection of facts which are multiplying without end’ (HE 2: 3–4).

As Braudy aptly summarises (1970, 59), in Hume’s historiography the ‘idea of a past filled with notable events and exemplary individuals gives way to a past defined by movement, process, and the tangled accumulation of causes’. Despite searching for an infrastructure to interpret and contain history, Hume still manages to convey a sense of the multiplicity of the past. He freely admits to the shortcomings of the historical record, bemoaning the fact that ‘the history of remote ages’ should always be ‘so much involved in obscurity, uncertainty, and contradiction’ (HE 1: 3). Moreover, historiography is a speculative art for Hume; his history is ultimately governed by likelihood and probability. He freely admits the limited narratological power of historiography and does not shy away from historical uncertainty. Since ‘unavoidable ignorance’ often renders one’s attempts ‘fruitless’, Hume argues that it is the job of the historian to supply ‘by conjecture what is wanting in knowledge’ (Hume 1826, 27). Consequently, Hume’s art in The History of England is one of rationalism, probability and persuasion:

It was probably the example of the French barons, which first emboldened the English to require greater independance from their sovereign: It is also probable, that the boroughs and corporations of England were established in imitation of those of France. It may, therefore, be proposed as no unlikely conjecture, that both the chief privileges of the peers in England and the liberty of the commons were originally the growth of that foreign country. (HE 1: 470–71, my emphasis)
As Fiona McIntosh-Varjabédian comments on Enlightenment historiography in general (2006, 110), ‘exactitude’ is less important than the ‘pertinence of the argument’ in Hume’s history. By employing a measured, authoritative voice and illuminating the multiple interpretations that can be gleaned from the past, Hume attempts to build an intimate relationship with the reader; he encourages them to follow his rational deductions and, thus, to participate in the historical process. His copious footnotes and appendices allow the reader to assess the validity of his verdicts for themselves. However, as McIntosh-Varjabédian points out (2006, 113–14), despite recognising the numerous possibilities of the past, it is ultimately Hume, the historian, that sets the field of probability and privileges select readings above other, equally plausible, explanations. As a narrative strategy which presupposes elements of continuity, probability itself provides a framework that sets a limit to the number of possible readings of the past; in effect, it is another method of containing the past. It is also important to highlight that, as *The History of England* progresses, Hume becomes even more concerned with matters of narrative coherence. As David Wootton notes (1993, 295), Hume perceives digressions (for example, observations on the arts and sciences) as a threat to structure and, consequently, moves them to appendices and footnotes. Furthermore, his rational, authoritarian voice undercuts the multiple impressions of the past that his experimental work of historiography occasionally attempts to convey.

THE RISE OF THE GOTHIC: WALPOLE’S HISTORIOGRAPHICAL DISCONTENT

Published two years after the publication of the final volume of *The History of England*, Walpole’s *Otranto* marks the birth of Gothic fiction. In the context of the eighteenth century and, more specifically, Hume’s work of Enlightenment history, the Gothic essentially emerges amidst a storm of historiographical debate and experimentation. In many respects Hume, a writer of history, and Walpole, a writer of fiction, share similar characteristics: both writers are fascinated by the past, interested in developing new methods of writing about it, reject totalising, systematic accounts of history and draw attention to the role of the self in historical writing. Walpole’s interaction with history in *Otranto* is essentially as experimental as Hume’s engagement with the past in *The History of England*. For example, Walpole’s representation of Manfred (the protagonist of *Otranto*) is, in many ways, comparable to Hume’s treatment of Cromwell and Charles I. Capable of ‘the most fatal excesses’ (*O* 94) and ‘exquisite villainy’ (*O* 34–35), Manfred simultaneously possesses a propensity for sympathy: he is not, writes Walpole, ‘one of those savage tyrants who wanton in cruelty unprovoked’ (*O* 30). Indeed, it may be argued
that Walpole’s treatment of Manfred’s character endorses Hume’s eventual view in *The History of England*: that character is not necessarily uniform, does not (solely) dictate the course of certain historical events and fails to provide an adequate framework or design for writing the past. Experiments with narrative and how best to write about man in time and history characterise both Hume’s and Walpole’s works. Hume is acutely aware of former histories and is keen to break new ground in eighteenth-century historiography: remarks such as ‘most historians have thought’ (*HE* 5: 510) and ‘contrary to the tenor of all the historians’ (*HE* 1: 165) are not uncommon in *The History of England*. Walpole uses fiction to paint ‘pictures of ancient manners’ and to bring the past ‘nearer to the imagination’ of the reader (1791, 84–85). To use the words of the latter, both Hume and Walpole essentially endeavour to give history a ‘new dress’ (1768, xi): to break with established modes of historiography and generate new ways of writing the past in a bid to make history attractive to a wider readership. However, this is perhaps where any mutual affinities between the two writers end, Walpole’s correspondence underlining this fact.⁷

Walpole’s letters reveal not only that he had read well beyond the first few volumes of *The History of England* before writing *Otranto*, but that he was thoroughly disenchanted with Hume’s work.⁸ Writing to the Reverend Henry Zouch on 15 March, 1759, Walpole expresses his discontent with Hume’s historiography: although he has ‘not advanced far’ in his reading of the ‘History of the House of Tudor’, he is displeased with what he considers is an ‘inaccurate’, ‘careless’ and ‘hasty’ historical account (1937–83, 16: 28). In a letter addressed to Sir David Dalrymple on 30 November, 1761, Walpole berates Hume’s history, arguing that ‘details’ are ‘so much avoided by him’ and the ‘whole rather skimmed than elucidated’ (15: 75).⁹ Writing to George Montagu on 8 December, 1761, Walpole comments, ‘I am now in Mr. Hume’s England, and would fain read no more’ (9: 407).

Negative allusions to Hume and his historiography pervade Walpole’s correspondence. He accuses *The History of England* of being ‘so falsified in many points, so partial in as many, so very unequal in its parts’ (10: 176) and criticises Hume for the ‘flimsy, ignorant, blundering manner’ in which he treats the ‘reigns preceding Henry VII’: it is ‘a proof’, writes Walpole, of ‘how little he had examined the history of our constitution’ (42: 78). As Rosemary Sweet notes (2004, 6), Walpole heavily criticised Hume for failing to support his statements with references in the first volume of *The History of England*. There were also a number of other disputes and controversies between Walpole and Hume.¹⁰ Indeed, Walpole’s enduring frustration with Hume’s history (and, to a certain extent, eighteenth-century historiography in general) is epitomised in his preface to *Historic Doubts on the
Life and Reign of King Richard the Third: ‘If we take a survey of our own history, and examine it with any attention, what an unsatisfactory picture does it present to us! How dry, how superficial, how void of information!’ (1768, ix).

The Gothic provides Walpole with a means of offsetting the inadequacies of The History of England and the philosophy that forms an integral part of it. Walpole admits as much in his correspondence with Madame Du Deffand: writing to her on 13 March, 1767, he declares that he wrote Otranto ‘in defiance of rules, of critics, and of philosophers’ (Walpole 1995). In terms of the early Gothic, actual historical accuracy (and even coherence) is not important: Otranto does not attempt to rationally and realistically chronicle a given historical period. It is more concerned with the ways in which the past comes to be narrativised and structured. The Gothic provides Walpole with a way of fashioning an entertaining, suspense-driven narrative and a means of critiquing Hume’s historiography through fiction. The very frame of Otranto complicates concepts of historical transmission, organisation and knowledge. In the preface to the first edition, Walpole declares that the ‘following work was found in the library of an ancient Catholic family in the north of England’ (O 5). Printed ‘at Naples, in the black letter, in the year 1529’, the original date of its composition ‘does not appear’ (O 5). Otranto’s very material existence thus undermines the all-encompassing, wide-ranging historiography of Hume and, moreover, rejects the Enlightenment metanarrative of history. As Fiona Robertson points out (1994, 86), Walpole’s Gothic novel provides a ‘fetishization of the processes of narrative’. Hume is preoccupied with the structure and pertinence of his own argument: the Gothic is fascinated with ‘the origin and transmission’ of the very ‘historical and pseudo-historical materials’ that are used to construct such arguments (86). The date of the events recounted in the narrative is not even clear: if ‘the story was written near the time when it is supposed to have happened’, writes Walpole, it ‘must have been between 1095, the æra of the first crusade, and 1243, the date of the last, or not long afterwards’ (O 5). In contrast to Hume’s history, the Gothic is fixated by aspects of the past that resist narrative synthesis.

Uncertainty, ambiguity and disorganisation characterise the past in Otranto. Before embarking on a more detailed discussion of the undecidable nature of the past in Walpole’s Gothic novel, it is necessary to readdress my earlier discussion regarding the duplicitous representation of Manfred’s character. Otranto may, similarly to The History of England, reveal the inadequacy of character as a method of analysing and ordering the past, but there is a fundamental difference between the two works: the latter still condones frameworks
for writing the past whereas the former rejects not only character (as embodied by Manfred) but any pre-determined narrative infrastructure employed to write and contain the past. Whether it is character, a revision of character, or the law, the Gothic reveals the futility of employing any abiding framework to interpret and unify the past; it is simply too remote and polymorphous for any infrastructure of understanding. Walpole utilises the Gothic to suggest that the imposition of any conceptual framework to understand and write the past will only inculcate distortion and reductionism. Hume alludes to the multifaceted nature of the past; the Gothic revels in the past’s incompleteness, incoherence and fragmentation. In *The History of England*, Hume confidently guides the reader through a defined field of historical probability, assuring them with his measured tones that the reading he privileges is the rational or natural one. In stark contrast to this, the Gothic heralds a loss of faith in humankind’s capability ‘to (unproblematically) know a past reality’, and, therefore, to be able to represent it in a narrative (Hutcheon 1995, 86). What we have in the preface to the first edition of *Otranto* is a growing awareness that, despite Hume’s frameworks and measured verdicts, it is impossible to know the past with any degree of certainty.

**OTRANTO AND THE TEXTUAL NATURE OF THE PAST**

Where Hume’s history endorses coherent narrative designs and measured, rational deductions, Walpole’s Gothic novel revels in abstruseness and incoherence. Before discussing this in greater detail, it is important to note that, along with frameworks of interpretation, measured, rational deduction characterises *The History of England*. As Peter Jones highlights (1993, 255–80), Hume’s history is essentially an exercise in sobriety with ‘flat and official verdicts’ evident on almost every page of every volume. Hume’s philosophy regarding narrative language pervades *The History of England*. As he argues in his essay ‘Of Simplicity and Refinement in Writing’, ‘simplicity’ of style should be given preference to excess ‘refinement’, especially when it comes to the treatment of ‘men, and actions, and passions’ (1825, 191–92). Furthermore, writers should at all times avoid employing ‘uncommon expressions, strong flashes of wit, pointed similes, and epigrammatic turns’ (189). Such techniques are, he contends, a ‘disfigurement’ rather than an ‘embellishment of discourse’ (189). To quote Hume’s words in *The Natural History of Religion*, historical writing should provide a ‘clear testimony’ (Hume 1976, 26). By employing coherent narrative structures, avoiding figurative language and maintaining a measured voice throughout, he earnestly believes that he can make the past (and the
process of its recovery) more transparent. Indeed, *The History of England* is underpinned by Hume’s belief that with clear, simplified language and coherent narrative structures, historical writing can, to a large extent, act as an ‘enlarged mirror’ (*HE* 5: 545) and ‘reflect’ the past as it was actually lived. The Gothic has a quite contrary view.

As I mentioned earlier, the first edition of Walpole’s novel is styled as a manuscript and, in effect, presents the reader with an actual fragment from the past. In his critical deliberations concerning Walpole, Sir Walter Scott highlights that (1829, 228), on publication, the authenticity of Walpole’s Gothic novel was not doubted: many readers actually believed it was an obscure manuscript from the past. Writing to Horace Walpole on 30 December, 1764, Thomas Gray writes, ‘we take it for a translation; and should believe it to be a true story if it were not for St Nicholas’ (1825, 266). To further complicate matters of historical knowability and authenticity, Walpole assumes the ‘personage of a translator’ (*O* 9). Originally composed in the ‘purest Italian’ (*O* 5) by Onuphrio Muralto, William Marshall (Walpole’s adopted personage) claims that he has had to translate the manuscript before presenting it to readers. Under the guise of Marshall, Walpole even highlights the difficulties involved in translation. ‘Our language’, he argues, ‘falls far short of the charms of the Italian, both for variety and harmony’ (*O* 7). Italian is ‘peculiarly excellent for simple narrative’, whereas it is ‘difficult in English to relate without falling too low or rising too high’ (*O* 7). It is so difficult to avoid distortion and to stay true to the original manuscript in the act of translation that Walpole even suggests that he will ‘re-print the original Italian’ (*O* 7) if his work is a success. Walpole’s “translator” is a stark reminder that, despite Hume’s longing for a certain amount of objectivity in historical writing, all historians can be compared to translators in the sense that they can only ever generate linguistic *representations* (or approximations) of the past. By revealing that historical knowledge is as much *engineered* by language and narrative structures as it is *discovered* in archives, *Otranto* significantly undermines Hume’s historiography. From its very inception, the Gothic draws attention to history not as the past, but as a *substitute* for the past.

Traditionally perceived as a distancing device, or a means of protecting the author from the potentially socially incendiary nature of his or her work, the convention of the discovered manuscript has added significance: it symbolises the Gothic’s obsession with, and problematisation of, historical knowledge. Styled as a translated manuscript, *Otranto* essentially presents the reader with a paradox: it purports to reveal the reality of the past, but our textualised access to it in the present. The Gothic illuminates the fact that our
access to the past is largely conditioned by textuality: in many cases, we can only (re)construct the past from the textual traces that have survived. Moreover, the device of the discovered manuscript (and the difficulties involved in its translation) undermines Hume’s rational historiographical interpretations by showing that ‘historical representations are necessarily distortions of a past whose real character can never be objectively transmitted’ (Holmes 1997, 54). Walpole’s contrived manuscript illuminates the contrived nature of all historical representations. Through the medium of fiction, Otranto radically ‘destabilizes received notions of both history and fiction’ (Hutcheon 1995, 88).

The Gothic effectively problematises everything that Hume’s history (and much eighteenth-century historiography influenced by Enlightenment doctrines) takes for granted: from the use of language, to narrative structures, to primary sources to historical authentication. The very fashioning of Otranto as a forgotten manuscript represents what might be seen as a satiric attack on Hume’s historiography: The History of England contains virtually no primary sources. Hume enters into ‘no Detail of minute, uninteresting Facts’ (1932, 1: 193), simply omitting eye-witness accounts, traditions, superstitious beliefs, legends and fables. In a letter addressed to Walpole on 2 August, 1758, Hume argues that were a reader to be presented with only primary sources, he or she ‘wou’d attain but a very confus’d idea’ of the ‘period’ spoken of (1: 285). The sheer volume of material and the difficulty of comprehending it would, Hume informs Walpole, be asking too much of the reader. History should, at all times, be related by a skilled historian who has had adequate training in writing the past. Moreover, Hume believes that a work of history should be ‘as complete as possible within itself’ and ‘should never refer, for any thing material, to other books’ (HE 1: 455). The device of the discovered script enables Walpole to reveal the irony of Hume’s decision to insert ‘no original Papers’ (1932, 1: 193) in The History of England: by its very nature, history is both textual and intertextual. Hume’s decision not to present the reader with original material, but to offer his reading of such material against a matrix of possible readings, is ridiculed by Walpole’s novel.

Furthermore, it is not only the lack of primary sources in The History of England that troubles Walpole: he is equally concerned with Hume’s attitude towards certain historical resources and beliefs.
WRITING THE PAST, WRITING THE PRESENT

In the preface to the first edition of Otranto, Walpole remarks that ‘belief in every kind of prodigy was so established’ in the ‘dark ages’ of which he writes that ‘an author would not be faithful to the manners of the times who should omit all mention of them’ (O 6). He is ‘not bound to believe them himself’, writes Walpole, but he ‘must represent his actors as believing them’ (O 6). These comments suggest that Walpole is not only aggrieved by the lack of primary sources in The History of England, but by the deliberate and sustained attack of the most dearly-held values and beliefs of former ages; whether these are religious, superstitious or otherwise. Indeed, it is important to note that the past Walpole constructs in Otranto is Catholic. As I mentioned earlier, in the first preface, the novel purports to be written by Onuphrio Muralto, a Catholic priest from the church of St Nicholas. The reader is also encouraged to infer that William Marshall (the gentleman who claims to have found the discovered manuscript) and the Catholic family from the North of England (where the script is supposedly found) are ‘one and the same’ (Miles 2002, 92).

Otranto marks the beginning of the Gothic’s complex relationship with Catholicism by associating Catholic Europe with ‘superstition, arbitrary power and passionate extremes’ (Botting 1996, 64). Walpole’s Gothic novel depicts Catholicism as a superstitious faith and, in this sense, encapsulates the Gothic’s complex relationship with Enlightenment historiography: throughout The History of England (and many works of Enlightenment history for that matter), Hume also associates the Catholic faith with irrational beliefs. However, in contrast to Walpole, Hume often disregards such beliefs as ‘superstition’ (HE 5: 223). Indeed, rather than simply mocking or repressing the perceived follies of Catholicism or any superstitious beliefs, Walpole gives expression to them and exploits their narrative potential. The Gothic continues to exploit aspects of the past that fall outside the scope of Enlightenment history. Moreover, Walpole focuses on Catholicism and superstitious beliefs not only to prey on the rationality of his largely Protestant readers, but to draw attention to the wider suppression of primitive beliefs in Hume’s Enlightenment work of historiography.

Raising an issue that will dominate future Gothic fiction, Walpole highlights that, despite aspirations for objectivity, historians such as Hume fail to divorce themselves from their own present and are, moreover, perpetually unable to obviate the effects of their own subjectivity. Walpole (under the guise of Marshall) highlights this tendency when he writes that, despite the fact that ‘more impartial readers’ may not be so ‘struck with the beauties’ of the narrative as he was, it is nonetheless ‘natural’ for him to be ‘prejudiced in
favour of his adopted work’ (O 6). Furthermore, Walpole proposes that the religious views of Onuphrio Muralto (the writer of the original manuscript) may have shaped the events recounted and the moral on which the action is founded: that the ‘sins of fathers are visited on their children to the third and fourth generation’ (O 6). This moral is weak, argues Walpole, not only because the punishment comes so long after the crime, thus minimising the ‘dread’ felt by the perpetrator, but because the original author, influenced by his profession, suggests such retribution may be ‘diverted by devotion to saint Nicholas’ (O 7). ‘Here’, writes Walpole, the ‘interest of the monk plainly gets the better of the judgment of the author’ (O 7). Indeed, the Gothic continually highlights that writing the past is an inherently narcissistic enterprise and that a certain amount of bias is an integral part of all historical writing. In relation to The History of England, the question is, however, the extent to which bias informs historiography and the consequences this has for the integrity of written accounts of the past.

Interestingly, Hume set out to write an impartial history of England: one that would be free from Whig and Tory biases and banish ignorance regarding the foundation of some of England’s most important institutions. By exposing the myths of political parties, Hume endeavoured to realistically and accurately trace how England arrived at its particular present. Before sending the first volume of The History of England off to press in early 1754, Hume (in direct contrast to Otranto’s translator) believes in the impartiality of his work. In a letter to Matthew Sharpe dated 25 February, 1754, he openly declares, ‘I am of no party, and have no bias’ (Hume 1932, 1: 185). However, despite his aim to write a history free of bias, Hume’s work bears all the hallmarks of subjectivity: from his professed dislike of intertextuality and primary sources, to his sentimental treatment of Charles I (HE 5: 220–21), to his religious scorn. Indeed, Hume’s personal correspondence betrays the fact that (then) contemporary political references and attitudes shape The History of England; even when the periods under discussion are in the very distant past and completely removed from the contemporary sphere of political action. ‘My views of things are more conformable to Whig principles; my representations of persons to Tory prejudices’, he writes (1932, 1: 237). In his personal correspondence, rather than in the historiography itself, Hume becomes very conscious of the role of the self in historical writing. In a letter to Sir Gilbert Elliot, dated 21 February, 1770, he speaks of his endeavours to ‘soften or expunge’ the ‘many villanous seditious Whig Strokes’ which have ‘crept into’ and characterise previous editions of The History of England (2: 216). Despite initial protestations of impartiality and a sustained effort to remain unbiased in the work
itself, Hume’s multi-volume history is as much a manifestation of personal, eighteenth-century and Enlightenment values as it is a history of England.

In tune with Enlightenment historical attitudes, *The History of England* is especially notable for its derision of religion and superstition. Writing of the Irish insurrection and massacre of 1641, Hume condemns established religion, expostulating that amidst all its ‘enormities’, the ‘sacred name of Religion resounded on every side; not to stop the hands’ of the murderers, but to ‘enforce their blows, and to steel their hearts against every movement of human or social sympathy’ (*HE* 5: 343). Such barbed comments are not uncommon in *The History of England* and resulted in Hume being labelled an atheist when it was first published. Often viewing any type of established religion as a form of superstition, his views on this latter topic are even more hostile. ‘Weakness, fear, melancholy, together with ignorance, are’, Hume argues in his essay ‘Of Superstition and Enthusiasm’, the ‘true sources of superstition’ (1825, 67). Superstition, or ‘the child of ignorance’ as Hume calls it in *The History of England* (*HE* 1: 215), is derided throughout his work, but especially in the volumes covering medieval times or the “dark ages:” the approximate setting of the events of *Otranto*. Hume’s history conveys a strong sense of cultural superiority and intimates that the age in which he is writing is one free from the vagaries of superstition. Indeed, *The History of England* gives the impression that its author is writing from a cultural vantage point by frequently ridiculing, undermining or completely censoring the most dearly held beliefs of former ages and the individuals that believed in them. For example, Hume’s abhorrence of the Britons, their regimes and their beliefs is all too apparent: ‘Thus, the bands of government, which were naturally loose among that rude and turbulent people, were happily corroborated by the terrors of their superstition’ (*HE* 1: 5–6). References to pre-Enlightened beliefs and peoples are invariably followed by derogatory terms such as ‘stupidity’ (*HE* 2: 519), ‘barbarism’ and ‘ignorance’ (*HE* 3: 427). As I mentioned earlier, Catholicism is frequently depicted as a faith with primitive beliefs and dismissed as ignorance and superstition. Seldom outlining what exactly the superstitious beliefs of previous ages were, Hume simply condemns them and uses them as a means of distancing an Enlightened present from an archaic past. In fact, Hume is so averse to primitive beliefs that he proposes that history, by exhibiting the ‘horrid and deformed’ aspects of former eras, can even act as an ‘antidote against superstition’ (*HE* 2: 519).

Walpole’s assertion that ‘partiality man cannot intirely divest himself of’ (1768, xii) epitomises his sentiments regarding Hume’s history and is a notion that greatly
influences *Otranto*: a work that can be read as a bold response to the bias and negation of superstition evident in *The History of England*. In contrast to Hume’s history, Walpole’s Gothic novel *is* faithful to the manners of the times because it details elements of superstition and represents the individuals who believe in them. Walpole chooses to represent rather than repress beliefs associated with Catholicism and, by doing so, preys on the superstitious beliefs that continue to haunt the Protestant faith and the imaginations of his readers. On hearing peculiar noises, Matilda (Manfred’s daughter) asks Bianca (her maid), if anyone is staying in the chamber directly below them. ‘Nobody has dared to lie there’, she answers, since ‘the great astrologer’ that tutored Conrad (Matilda’s recently deceased brother) ‘drowned himself’ (*O* 38). Despite the fact that the strange noises are later found to emanate from Theodore (a peasant who is revealed to be the legitimate heir to Otranto) in the apartment below, Bianca proposes that the ghosts of the astrologer and the young prince ‘are now met in the chamber below’ (*O* 39). Uninhibited by the manuscript’s writer and translator, the reader is granted full access not only to Bianca’s superstitious attitude, but to the superstitious beliefs that formed such an integral part of the age in which Walpole lived. Even Matilda, a member of the upper class and thus traditionally expected to possess more refined views, is revealed to be in the grips of superstition. Building on Bianca’s theory, she proposes, firstly, that if the ‘spirits’ below are in pain, they may ‘ease their suffering by questioning them’ and, secondly, that such spirits can mean no harm to either herself or Bianca because they ‘have not injured them’ (*O* 39). Indeed, the entire cast of *Otranto* are revealed to be superstitious, and, in contrast to Hume’s history, such beliefs are given full expression.

Countering Hume’s negative attitude towards superstition and propensity for letting the present inform the past, religious and superstitious beliefs proliferate in Walpole’s Gothic novel: from the widely feared prophecy that ‘the castle and lordship of Otranto’ will pass ‘from the present family’ whenever ‘the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it’ (*O* 17) to the creed that ‘the sins of fathers are visited on their children to the third and fourth generation’ (*O* 6). As Scott aptly points out (1829, 232), it is the object of Walpole’s Gothic novel ‘to draw such a picture of domestic life and manners, during the feudal times, as might actually have existed’ and to ‘paint it chequered and agitated by the action of supernatural machinery, such as the superstition of the period received as matter of devout credulity’. Walpole’s Gothic novel comprehensively rejects the cultural supremacy assumed by Hume in *The History of England*. For Walpole, the writing of history should not (at least deliberately) be coloured by the dominant (Enlightened) values
and politics of the present. *Otranto* (and particularly its preface) illuminates that all historical writing is subjective in the sense that it inevitably encapsulates elements of the present. However, Walpole’s Gothic novel effectively acts as a foil to *The History of England* by recounting the belief systems of former ages: the very act of inclusion draws attention to the distorting effects that Hume’s excess subjectivity and (sometimes) deliberate encoding and implementation of personal and political attitudes can bring to bear on the past. In fact, one of the reasons that Scott (in agreement with Walpole himself) perceives *Otranto* as a ‘new species’ of literary composition and as a forerunner to the historical novel is because of the ‘purity’ of the language maintained throughout and the care taken to avoid (deliberate) references to the present (1829, 239–40).

Assuming that *Otranto* is (at least in part) a response to *The History of England*, it is important to consider the wider extent of Walpole’s reaction to Hume’s assumed cultural imperiousness. Hume’s comments in his essay, ‘Of the Study of History’, are of interest here. Contemplating the pleasure of reading history, Hume argues that there are few things more enjoyable than observing ‘all the human race, from the beginning of time, pass, as it were, in review before us, appearing in their true colours, without any of those disguises which, during their lifetime, so much perplexed the judgment of the beholders’ (1854, 510). Such a comment inculcates the belief that the past can be studied objectively from the present; Hume fails to recognise that the values of the present colour interpretations of the past. This is certainly the case with *The History of England*. As I discussed a moment ago, Hume’s history (especially for the contemporary reader) conveys the distinct impression that the age in which he is writing and judging the past is one free from primitive beliefs. By including superstitious beliefs, not judging them and exploiting their narrative potential, Walpole is not only being (historically) faithful to a former age, but is further satirising Hume’s position. *Otranto* reveals that superstitious beliefs have formed an integral part of human history and, even in an “Enlightened” (and Protestant) age, continue to hold sway. Eighteenth-century England was gripped by superstition and the invocation of such beliefs in *Otranto* was, arguably, one of the reasons for its immense success. When read alongside *The History of England*, therefore, *Otranto* reveals that Hume’s supposedly realistic account of the past actually generates a fictional impression of the present. There is a great deal of irony in all this: the “Enlightened” age that Hume affects throughout his historiography is in fact as fictional as the one Walpole represents in his Gothic novel. In response to dominant modes of historiography, the Gothic exposes the historian’s tendency to not only disfigure the past, but to falsify the present. *Otranto*
reveals that Hume’s strategy of deriding or omitting superstitious beliefs that are still very much part of the present is absurd and, moreover, illuminates the constructed nature of history. By including elements that eighteenth-century historiography ignores, the Gothic reveals that, similarly to the writing of fiction, the writing of history ‘involves a selection of detail, a determination of emphasis, a narrational shaping’ (Cowart 1989, 17).

AN IMAGINATIVE REVOLT

To adapt Walpole’s words in a letter to Lady Hervey dated 20 February, 1759, *Otranto* ‘contains many of those important truths that history is too proud to tell, and too dull from not telling’ (1937–83, 31: 12). In addition to including the formerly neglected popular beliefs of previous ages, Walpole employs another means to write those aspects of the past that Hume excludes: the human imagination. Walpole’s invocation of this faculty can be read as a profound reaction to Hume’s philosophical speculations. Throughout Hume’s philosophical works, the imagination has an ambivalent status. In contrast to Enlightenment thinkers such as Locke, Hume is largely in opposition to the rationalist portrayal of humanity. ‘Reason is, and ought only to be’, writes Hume in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ‘the slave of the passions and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them’ (1911, 2: 127). Indeed, as John Biro points out (1993, 43), Hume’s anatomy of the mind posits a divide between reason, a reflective faculty for making judgements based on evidence, and the imagination, a non-rational faculty that automatically shifts from experience to belief. Whilst reason and memory preserve ‘the original order and position’ of ideas, the imagination is a force of liberty in the sense that it ‘transposes and changes’ such ideas ‘as it pleases’ (Hume 1911, 1: 87). The imagination is a vital part of human nature for Hume: it is a creative faculty that saves individuals from the scepticism and doubts engendered by reason. However, despite lauding the creative potential of the human imagination and illuminating its importance in terms of human survival, it is a faculty that deeply unsettles Hume and complicates his professed rejection of certain Enlightenment beliefs.

A sense of ambiguity and menace surrounds Hume’s reflections on the imagination. Whilst never undermining the importance of this most powerful of faculties, it is represented as a constant threat to order, especially in *A Treatise of Human Nature*. ‘The imagination’, writes Hume, has the ‘command’ over all ideas and ‘can join, and mix, and vary them in all the ways possible’ (1: 99–100). So powerful is the imagination, in fact, that it is a ‘custom’ that operates ‘before we have time for reflection’ (1: 106) and is
frequently overactive: it continues to function ‘even after the reason has ceased, which first determined it to begin’ (1: 54). Hume’s reflections intimate that the imagination possesses a propensity for anarchy and disorder. ‘The imagination, when set into any train of thinking’, writes Hume later on in *A Treatise*, ‘is apt to continue even when its object fails it, and, like a galley put in motion by the oars, carries on its course without any new impulse’ (1: 192). Hume’s representation suggests that the individual has very little willed control over the imagination and that, moreover, this faculty is in constant need of restraint. Hume’s reflections on reason, a force of order, are not as threatening as his deliberations concerning the imagination, a force of disorder. Despite his anti-rationalist affinities, Hume betrays a preference for the order instilled by reason. When it comes to past events in particular, Hume suggests that imagination is inferior to reason: where the latter can maintain the order of events over a long duration, the former cannot, ‘without difficulty’, preserve coherence and uniformity for ‘any considerable time’ (1: 18). *The History of England* embodies Hume’s preference for reason and disinclination towards the ‘natural infirmity and unsteadiness’ of the imagination (1: 48). Bleached of figurative language and replete with sobering images and remarks, Hume’s historiography makes little use of the imagination and succeeds in stifling its creative potential. Next to the fact that such beliefs violate his own values and those of the Enlightenment, Hume may avoid going into details about superstition, the supernatural and other phenomenon because such subjects resist reason (cause and effect) and stimulate the imagination (a non-rational faculty). Throughout *The History of England* imagination is strictly prohibited and viewed as a threat to historical coherence and integrity.

As the following comments Walpole makes in a letter to Madame Du Deffand intimate, *Otranto* may be considered as a strong reaction to Hume’s latent fear of the imagination and inclination towards reason in *The History of England*:

> I have not written the book for the present age, which will endure nothing but cold common sense… this is the only one of my books with which I am myself pleased; I have given reins to my imagination till I became on fire with those visions and feelings which it excited (Walpole 1995)

Throughout his Gothic novel, Walpole rejects reason as the governing principle of historiography and invokes the human imagination (both his own and that of the reader) as a way of writing history and of liberating the past from the ideologies of the present. In contrast to Hume, Walpole demonstrates that imagination should not be seen as a threat to reason and historical accounts. He illustrates that the imagination should be embraced as a
valuable tool for making the past “live:” making it something to which readers (of all historical ages) can relate. This is especially the case with the supernatural, attitudes towards which form an integral part of cultures throughout the ages. As I discussed previously, Hume’s preference for reason results in a filtering of the past through the present in *The History of England*. He rarely enters into details concerning preternatural events and, when they are mentioned, they are always portrayed as a failure of reasoning, as the following quotation regarding the Saxons exemplifies: ‘The knowledge of natural causes was neglected from the universal belief of miraculous interpositions and judgements’ (*HE* 1: 51). In *Otranto*, Walpole radically readdresses *The History of England’s* exorcism of imagination and, by doing so, writes about a subject that pervades all ages and yet one that is neglected by Hume and his preference for reason: the supernatural. By not only recounting superstitious beliefs, but imaginatively manifesting them throughout his narrative, Walpole draws further attention to Hume’s contempt and even omission of ancient beliefs.

In opposition to Hume’s philosophy, Walpole’s Gothic novel demonstrates that the imagination *can* be sustained long enough to write past events and that we have far more control over this faculty than Hume suggests. Indeed, *Otranto* is essentially an imaginative revolt against the subjugation of the imagination in *The History of England*. Imaginative, supernatural events manifest themselves everywhere in Walpole’s Gothic novel. A portrait of Manfred’s grandfather (Ricardo) comes to life, leaves its frame and walks around with a ‘grave and melancholy air’ (*O* 24–25). Conrad is killed by a giant ‘helmet’ that appears to ‘fall from the moon’ (*O* 41), the ‘sable plumes’ of which move as if ‘bowed by some invisible wearer’ (*O* 53). A ‘gigantic sword’ falls opposite to this helmet and remains ‘immoveable’ (*O* 59). With designs to marry Matilda, Frederic (Isabella’s father) is warned against such a course of action by a deceased hermit who earlier aided his discovery of the gigantic sabre. Turning around and revealing to Frederic the ‘fleshless jaws and empty sockets of a skeleton’, the ghostly hermit warns him against the pursuit of ‘carnal delights’ (*O* 93). ‘Three drops of blood’ fall inexplicably ‘from the nose of Alfonso’s statue’ (*O* 85). Alfonso the Good was the original master of Otranto, but was poisoned and usurped by Manfred’s grandfather, Ricardo. In a series of supernatural occurrences, gigantic parts of Alfonso’s body are sighted around the castle: ‘it is a giant, I believe; he is all clad in armour, for I saw his foot and part of his leg, and they are as large as the helmet below in the court’ (*O* 32). At the end of the novel, a ‘vision’ of Alfonso, ‘dilated to an immense magnitude’, appears in the centre of the (now) ruined castle to declare that Theodore is ‘the
true heir of Alfonso!’ (O 98). Walpole does not only use his own imagination: he stimulates those of his readers and attempts to bring them into a closer relationship with the beliefs of former ages. The invocation of the imagination and presence of elements of the fantastic in *Otranto* subverts the ‘normative ways’ of perceiving reality and thus the past endorsed by Hume’s rational historiography (Howard 2001, 43).

In this sense, perhaps the most significant quasi-supernatural incident to occur in *Otranto* involves Manfred and his (supposed) exclusive sighting of Alfonso’s ghost:

> My dearest, gracious lord, cried Hippolita, clasping him in her arms, what is it you see? Why do you fix your eye-balls thus? – What! Cried Manfred breathless – dost thou see nothing, Hippolita? Is this ghastly phantom sent to me alone (O 73)

As a result of this uncanny physical resemblance, Manfred believes he is staring at Alfonso’s ghost when, in reality, he is looking at Theodore. The ‘delirium’ of Manfred’s brain unhinges him: he is genuinely at a loss to know whether the vision presented to him is ‘Theodore, or a phantom’ (O 74). Such an occurrence radically undermines the existence of a common phenomenological reality and negates even the possibility of viewing the past objectively. The Gothic problematises the very conception of reality that underpins Hume’s historiography.

As Walter Scott so aptly observes (1829, 226–27), the author of *Otranto* ‘is not a mere collector of dry and minute facts’: Walpole ‘brings with him the torch of genius’, his imagination, to ‘illuminate the ruins’ of the past ‘through which he loves to wander’. Of course, the obvious question that arises here concerns historical accuracy and coherence: surely Walpole’s embodiment of imaginative and supernatural fears of former ages does, as Hume would argue, disorganise the past. The short answer to this question is yes: the imagination is a force of disorder in *Otranto*. Supernatural events erupt at random intervals and twist and turn the narrative. However, Walpole’s position is this: the human imagination may well be a disorganising power, but this is no reason for it to be banished from the realm of historical writing. Its merits, its ability to grab the attention of the reader and to make one aware of formerly ignored (or omitted) parts of the past far outweigh its organisational disadvantages. This aspect of Walpole’s response to Hume’s aversion to the imagination is really quite profound. Underlying *The History of England* is the belief that only reason, not the imagination, can order and essentially (re)construct the past. Behind *Otranto* is the idea that reason and order can never effectively capture the past and that the imagination, an unstable, explosive and disorganised faculty, is the most effective means of writing a past (and a reality) that is by its very nature similarly unstable, disjointed and
incoherent. *Otranto* proposes that the imagination brings us closer to the actual essence of reality and the past and, by doing so, suggests that historical accounts written entirely on the basis of reason are only ever a façade: histories such as Hume’s use reason to mask the vast discontinuities that comprise the past. Histories bereft of imagination and oriented towards reason impose a false order on the past. *Otranto* carries with it the implicit suggestion that the reasoning of eminent eighteenth-century historians such as Hume is as fictional and imaginative as the preternatural occurrences it records. Furthermore, the imaginative, disorganised nature of *Otranto* draws attention to the formulaic nature of Hume’s historiography, its predisposition to recount the events that eminent figures were involved in during their lives and to examine their characters in detail after their deaths. The Gothic highlights that the past simply does not take such a structured form. Walpole’s utilisation of the creative potential of the human imagination also further undermines Hume’s restrictive frameworks of reasoning. In terms of the Gothic, the imagination is not eighteenth-century history’s enemy: it brings one into closer contact with the past and should thus be one of historiography’s allies.

**WRITING THE PAST, WRITING THE UNCIVILISED**

In many respects, the Gothic is history’s other: it includes elements that Enlightenment historiography omits and problematises our relationship to the past. This brings me to another important characteristic of Hume’s historiography. *The History of England* is notable for its suppression of violent events; the bloody deeds and transgressions that formed an integral part of England’s past are generally softened or omitted. Hume argues that the ‘sudden, violent, and unprepared revolutions, incident to Barbarians’ are ‘so much guided by caprice, and terminate so often in cruelty’ that ‘they disgust us by the uniformity of their appearance’ (*HE* 1: 3–4). It is ‘rather fortunate for letters’ and historiography, observes Hume, that such deeds are often ‘buried in silence and oblivion’ (*HE* 1: 4).

Writing from an “Enlightened” perspective, Hume argues that ‘the adventures of barbarous nations, even if they were recorded, could afford little or no entertainment to men born in a more cultivated age’ (*HE* 1: 3). Moreover, it would be ‘almost impossible’ and certainly ‘tedious’ to ‘relate particularly all the miseries to which the English were thenceforth exposed’ (*HE* 1: 117–18). Such an enterprise, he argues, would be sickening and teach us nothing. We would ‘hear of nothing but the sacking and burning of towns; the devastation of the open country; the appearance of the enemy in every quarter of the kingdom; their cruel diligence in discovering any corner, which had not been ransacked by their former
violence’ (HE 1: 118). For Hume, such bloody events are simply not the province of Enlightenment historiography. The question we ask as readers though is, why? Surely the violent aspects of England’s past are just as important and have as much claim to coverage as its particular characters and laws? The answer to this question is manifold.

In an interesting comment, Hume argues that the recording of bloody deeds is suited to older forms of historiography: the ‘broken and disjointed narration of the antient historians’ is ‘well adapted to the nature of the war’ (HE 1: 118), he argues. Indeed, this comment suggests that the horrific and bloody battles that punctuate England’s past jeopardise the coherence of his historical account. Such events are softened or omitted because they ‘endanger the writer’s authority’, historical frameworks and, moreover, the validity of his rational conclusions (McIntosh-Varjabédian 2006, 113). Writing of the battle of Mearcredes-Burn, Hume keeps mention of bloodshed and violence to a minimum: ‘though the Saxons seem to have obtained the victory, they suffered so considerable a loss, as somewhat retarded the progress of their conquests’ (HE 1: 20). This example demonstrates that when it comes to dealing with traumatic events in England’s past, they must be interpreted and contained within a wider framework. The details surrounding the violent battle that took place at Mearcredes-Burn are absent; it is the greater context of the ‘progress’ of the Saxons that is important to Hume. As McIntosh-Varjabédian highlights (2006, 113), in Hume’s historiography, horror and crimes must be encompassed by a causal chain (in this example, Saxon progress) in which one factor reinforces the next. Violent, ‘unnatural practices’ that resist causal reasoning are simply ‘not fit to be named’ (HE 6: 337) and are consequently omitted. The best way to write history, argues Hume, is to pass over violent, discontinuous events and to focus primarily on the developing ‘language, manners, and customs’ of our ‘ancestors’ (HE 1: 4).

As Hume’s analysis of eminent figures and prominent laws reveals, The History of England focuses almost exclusively on the evolution of civilised forms of society. Hume’s remarks towards the end of volume two are quite telling in this respect and reveal a great deal about what he believed history should achieve:

Thus have we pursued the history of England through a series of many barbarous ages; till we have at last reached the dawn of civility and sciences, and have the prospect, both of greater certainty in our historical narrations, and of being able to present to the reader a spectacle more worthy of his attention (HE 2: 518)

A greater respect and focus is given for more ‘cultivated age[s]’ (HE 1: 3) and the continuity of civil society is given preference to the barbaric events that comprise
England’s past in Hume’s history. As Braudy notes (1970, 83), instead of ‘contemplating the record of irrationality and cruelty’, Hume seeks ‘the materials of continuity and the growth of community interest’. For Hume, history should survey ‘manners, finances, arms, commerce, arts and sciences’ (HE 6: 140). In the rare instances that he does recount violence, it is used to accentuate a distance between a civilised present and a barbaric past. Aspects of the past that are ‘horrid and deformed’ teach us to cherish ‘science and civility’ (HE 2: 518–19). The nearer Hume gets to his own age, the fewer the references to violence. Recounting the reign of terror conducted by Hengist, a Saxon general, Hume notes how the ‘private and public edifices of the Britons were reduced to ashes’, how ‘priests were slaughtered’ on their altars and how people were ‘intercepted and butchered in heaps’ (HE 1: 19). He refers to such gratuitous acts of violence (especially in the medieval volumes) in order to demonstrate to the reader that contemporary society bears no resemblance to its primitive, gruesome past.

In his introductory remarks to ‘Maddalena’, Walpole identifies a trend in eighteenth-century historiography: historians such as Hume (and the educated members of the public who read such histories) tend to look back on ‘the dark ages’ with a ‘fond enthusiasm’ for its ‘brighter’ and more positive aspects, whilst steeping into ‘a willing forgetfulness of its darker and more repugnant shapes’ (1973, 23). In Otranto, Walpole radically readdresses this balance. Whereas Hume’s history shines a spotlight on the history of civilised society, the Gothic probes the uncivilised aspects of the past that remain in shadow. For example, Otranto is pervaded by one of the vilest acts humans can commit as the threat of incest literally haunts the novel. Manfred pursues an ‘incestuous design’ by attempting to marry his ‘contracted daughter’ (O 45), Isabella, the young woman that Manfred’s son, Conrad, was to marry shortly before his violent and premature end. Furthermore, in a bid to persuade Father Jerome to aid the proceedings of his divorce, Manfred claims that he and his wife, Hippolita, are related in ‘the fourth degree’ (O 46). Manfred’s description of Conrad as ‘a sickly puny child’ (O 23) only strengthens this suggestion. Subjects that would be strictly taboo in Hume’s history are, nevertheless, an integral part of history (as they are in the present) and therefore considered eligible for discussion. Impulsive, pugnatory acts receive the same treatment.

In contrast to The History of England, Walpole’s Gothic novel is not only punctuated by, but dwells on violent events. ‘The valour that had so long been smothered in his breast’ (O 69) breaking forth, Theodore brutally attacks a knight who he believes is in league with Manfred. Much to his dismay he discovers that the knight is in fact
Isabella’s father, Frederic; an enemy of Manfred. Despite the vast amount of ‘blood that flowed from his wounds’ (O 69), however, Frederic survives. Mistaking Matilda for Isabella, Manfred mistakenly murders his own daughter, plunging his dagger into her bosom: ‘heaven directed my bloody hand to the heart of my child!’ cries Manfred shortly after attempting ‘to recover his dagger from Theodore to dispatch himself’ (O 95–96).

Indeed, Otranto draws attention not only to acts of violence in history, but to illogical and impulsive actions that punctuate the past. The Gothic focuses on the irrational nature of humankind and the past. In this respect Walpole (rather ironically) achieves what Hume originally set out to do in The History of England: to reveal aspects of the human species that remain the same in all times and all places. Hume loses track of his original philosophical aim in the course of his history by creating a vast gulf between “civilised” (post medieval) and “uncivilised” (medieval) man. By revealing the irrational actions of humanity and the impact that such impulsive, spontaneous acts have on the outcome of certain historical events, Walpole not only draws attention to the historian’s role as editor of the past, but reveals how contemporary man is not all that different from his medieval ancestors. The Gothic explodes the barrier between man past and present and, as a result, makes the (contemporary) reader contemplate the uncivilised human instincts that have determined (and continue to determine) historical events throughout the ages.

The following remark that the “modern editor” makes in the preface to Otranto is quite telling: the principal arguments of the narrative may have occurred in ‘the darkest ages of Christianity’, he writes, but the ‘language and conduct have nothing that savours of barbarism’ (O 5). These comments represent what may be considered as a veiled attack on the emphasis Hume places on the barbarity of medieval man. A certain amount of barbarism determines man both past and present: it is an inherent part of the human condition. Perhaps the most irrational, violent and gruesome incident in Otranto is the death of Conrad, Manfred’s son and heir:

But what a sight for a father’s eyes! – He beheld his child dashed to pieces, and almost buried under an enormous helmet, an hundred times more large than any casque ever made for human being, and shaded with a proportionable quantity of black feathers (O 18)

Rather than suppressing the violence of Conrad’s death, Walpole accentuates it. Whether it is the ‘bleeding mangled remains’, the ‘disfigured corpse’ or the ‘dashed out’ brains of the ‘young prince’, Walpole spares the reader few details (O 19–20). The Gothic is effectively the negative of Enlightenment historiography; it records the darker aspects of human history. The foreign setting of Walpole’s novel reflects the foreignness of the past: it is
radically different and far more violent and uncivilised than Hume’s structured, coherent and civilised historical account suggests. Walpole makes a sustained effort to capture violent events in the past and, by doing so, exposes the artificial and constructed nature of Hume’s (and much eighteenth-century) historiography. Where eighteenth-century historians such as Hume and writers such as Henry Fielding are concerned with the continuity of human nature and civilised forms of society throughout the ages, the Gothic focuses on the volatility of human nature and the uncivilised acts that comprise past, present and future. In this sense, *Otranto* marks a return of the repressed. It embodies the macabre elements of human nature and history that eighteenth-century historiography represses. The Gothic forces the children of the Enlightenment to contemplate the sinister nature of their own pasts and the bloody deeds upon which their present age is founded. Moreover, as the incidents mentioned above indicate, such events are not placed in a causal chain or narrative framework in Walpole’s Gothic novel: they appear to be completely random and, by their unexpected nature, resist traditional historiographical frameworks of understanding.

**THE GOTHIC AND CHANCE**

To adapt the words Walpole uses in the postscript to his play, *The Mysterious Mother*, *Otranto* is governed by chance and is ‘more apt to produce improbable situations than to remove them’ (1791, 91). Theodore accidentally wounds Frederic and, even though the deaths of Matilda and Conrad can be interpreted within the frame of ‘*the sins of the fathers are visited on their children to the third and fourth generation***’ (a moral that, as I mentioned earlier, Walpole undermines, O 6–7), their violent demises occur suddenly and unexpectedly. The past is never as ordered and teleological as Hume’s historiography suggests. The sightings of Alfonso’s limbs occur at random intervals, whilst Manfred’s attempt to follow the ghost of his grandfather into a chamber is inexplicably foiled when the door is ‘clapped-to with violence by an invisible hand’ (O 25). The occurrence of such events resists rational explanation. It is arguably only by chance that the original Italian manuscript written by Onuphrio Muralto is found in a library in the north of England in the first place.

In response to Hume’s negation of contingency in *The History of England*, events governed by chance dominate *Otranto*. Because all events share a ‘species of unity’ (Hume 1826, 27), Hume argues that there is ‘no such thing as *Chance* in the world’ (67). Consequently, *The History of England* recounts very few events that are of a contingent
nature. Chance, Hume argues, is ‘nothing real in itself’: it is ‘the negation of a cause’ (1911, 1: 127) or ‘nothing but a secret and concealed cause’ (1: 131). Due to the fact that in ‘every part of nature’ there is ‘contained a vast variety of springs and principles, which are hid, by reason of their minuteness or remoteness’ (1: 133), historiography that recounts events seemingly determined by chance really exhibit ‘ignorance of the real cause of any event’ (Hume 1826, 67). For Hume, this is simply not the premise of historical writing.

Walpole firmly rejects such philosophical speculations regarding chance. Conrad’s abrupt death by means of a giant, supernatural helmet is particularly telling in this respect: the very absurdity of such a sudden and bizarre occurrence can be read as an attack against the omission of chance in Hume’s history. The helmet is also an artefact of war and draws attention to the repression of violent incidents in Enlightenment historical writing. The occurrence of accidents, natural or supernatural, illuminates how far removed from reality Hume’s historiography really is. As Walpole remarks in the postscript to The Mysterious Mother, he is more interested in the ‘sudden and unforeseen strokes’ of human life and bringing historic events ‘nearer to the imagination’ (1791, 84).

Moreover, it is not only violent and supernatural events that occur out of the blue and defy rational explanation in Otranto. Although supernatural agency ultimately determines the outcome of the novel, it is pervaded by miscommunication, chance and contingency. In the labyrinthine passages of Otranto, Theodore mistakes Matilda for Isabella: ‘What! Said Theodore, was it another, and not thy lovely self, that I assisted to find the subterraneous passage?’ (O 65) Through an act of miscommunication, Hippolita, who is very much alive and well, is presumed dead; hearing Bianca cry out ‘the princess is dead!’ when Matilda faints, Martelli (a friar) presumes she means Hippolita and communicates his news to the convent (O 77). It is completely by chance that Father Jerome (or the Count of Falconara, as it turns out) meets his son in Manfred’s court: ‘Gracious heaven! Cried the holy man starting, what do I see! It is my child! My Theodore!’ (O 51). Presumed to be a peasant boy with an uncanny ‘resemblance’ to ‘Alfonso’s portrait’ (O 87), Theodore turns out to be the ‘true heir of Alfonso!’ (O 98). The presence of chance in Walpole’s novel complicates the chains of simple causality manifested in Hume’s history. Although The History of England does not completely ignore the role of contingency in the past (as the very concept of the field of probability underlines), it is sacrificed to an emphasis on continuity, chronology and coherence.

Otranto exaggerates the contingent nature of reality and thus the past and, by doing so, creates suspense and reveals the reductionism inherent in Hume’s historical work. Again,
narrative frameworks create a false impression of reality and the past. Indeed, the Gothic is effectively an attempt to emancipate the reader from the unnatural structures imposed on reality and the past by Hume’s historiography. *Otranto* reveals the past in all its obscurity, partiality and discontinuity. Where eighteenth-century Enlightenment historiography emphasises coherence, chronology and order, the Gothic demonstrates that such effects are merely illusions created by historians.

THE GOTHIC, DOMESTICATION AND DEFAMILIARISATION

From its inception then, the Gothic has been actively involved in defamiliarising the past. In contrast to *The History of England*, *Otranto* makes a sustained effort to impart a sense of the past as it is perceived, not as it is ‘known’ (Shklovsky 2004, 16). A past that is seemingly *heimliche* in Hume’s historiography is ever so *unheimliche* in Walpole’s Gothic novel. To adapt Viktor Shklovsky’s words (2004, 16), the Gothic removes the past from the automatism of perception: eighteenth-century historiography’s conception of the past as something inherently knowable and familiar is comprehensively negated. To a much greater extent than Hume’s *The History of England* (and Enlightenment history in general), the Gothic conveys a sense of the ‘epistemological uncertainty’ in which man, pre and post Enlightenment, has existed (Braudy 1970, 176). Fiction suggests revisions for historiography. Championing the use of imagination in the writing of history, Walpole attempts to release the past from the shackles of dominant, reductive modes of historiography.

Despite being set in a foreign location, *Otranto* also marks a domestication of the past: in contrast to Hume’s history, the home and the family become subjects eligible for historical analysis. The reader learns not only of the dark secret that literally haunts Manfred, but of the effect of this on the ordinary lives of his family, servants and individuals present within his household at the time (for example, Theodore). In his preface to the first edition of *Otranto*, Walpole highlights the importance of members of the lower classes (such as Bianca) in the events that take place; through their ‘ naïveté and simplicity’, they ‘discover many passages essential’ to the action (*O 6*). *Otranto* helps to alter the focus of history from the public to the private, from the upper classes to the lower classes. The Gothic illuminates *The History of England*’s (and to a certain extent Enlightenment historiography’s) propensity for exclusion.

Developing themes such as the dysfunctional family and a focus on violent deeds, Walpole’s Gothic novel draws attention to aspects of the past that Enlightenment history
neglects. While *The History of England* attempts to convey a sense of national historical consciousness, the Gothic endeavours to stimulate an awareness of the historically conditioned nature of one’s own existence. The Gothic is not an alternative mode of historiography in its own right; it is an imaginative protest against rational, reductive historiographical techniques. As Walpole himself notes (1768, 94), despite convicting historians of ‘partiality, absurdities, contradictions, and falsehoods’ (and generally undermining their ‘credit’) he has not ventured to establish any abiding historiographical theory or ‘peremptory conclusion’ of his own. As opposed to providing solutions, the Gothic revels in its propensity for dismantling established epistemic systems and creating fear and unease. As I have already mentioned in this chapter, between his rational, authoritative deductions and organisational frameworks, Hume offers the reader occasional glimpses of a multi-dimensional past in *The History of England*. It is out of these cracks, these glimmers of a multifarious past, that the Gothic grows and begins to flourish. Emerging out of the shadows of Enlightenment historiography, the Gothic highlights the need for a more flexible, elastic method of writing the past; one that can more effectively accommodate imagination, violence and contingency.

As this thesis demonstrates, in its later manifestations, the Gothic continues to probe the nature of historical knowledge and to react to Enlightenment conceptions of history. However, in a more marked way than *Otranto*, Gothic pasts are increasingly used as vehicles to comment on anxieties in the present and engage more closely with their immediate historical contexts. Indeed, even though Walpole was the son of Whig Prime Minister, Robert Walpole, and served as an MP, his political attitudes in *Otranto* remain somewhat ambiguous. As I mentioned earlier, Walpole argued that his Gothic novel was essentially an act of ‘defiance’ against his own time (Walpole 1995). *Otranto* is concerned with historico-political subjects that were debated intensely during the eighteenth century, such as lineage, inheritance and the power of the aristocracy, but, as Andrew Smith argues (2007, 22), Walpole’s political attitudes towards such subjects remain unclear and it is difficult to assess the extent to which his eighteenth-century political attitudes shape the past in *Otranto*. As this thesis reveals, later Gothic writers—and particularly female authors—give the Gothic a more distinctive political edge. This is certainly the case with the Gothic’s next incarnation: Clara Reeve’s *The Old English Baron* (1778). As I discuss in the next chapter, the fifteenth-century past of Reeve’s novel is heavily influenced by her Whig political beliefs and can be read as a reaction to the crisis of national identity engendered by the American Revolution. In Reeve’s hands, the Gothic continues to probe
the nature of the past and to react to Enlightenment conceptions of history. However, she takes particular issue with Walpole’s use of the supernatural and redevelops a number of Gothic tropes in order to give the genre a firmer moral purpose.

Notes

1. Walpole’s Strawberry Hill symbolised his interest in medieval history and his enchantment with the past. Adding cloisters, battlements, turrets, stained glass and fireplaces to his house, Walpole helped to revive the Gothic style of architecture. The house became a celebrated attraction in the eighteenth century. Referring to the structure as his ‘little Gothic Castle’ (1937–83, 20: 111), Strawberry Hill is intricately connected with the composition of Otranto. Walpole even encouraged his readers to draw parallels between his Gothic narrative and house. ‘When you read of the picture quitting its panel’, he writes to a friend, ‘did not you recollect the portrait of Lord Falkland all in white in my gallery?’ (1: 88). In the preface to the first edition of Otranto, there are further associations with Strawberry Hill: the reader is told that the ‘scene is undoubtedly laid in some real castle’ and that ‘the author had some certain building in his eye’ when he wrote his narrative (O 7).

2. As Ruth Mack notes (2009, 111–12), even though he was a member of the Society of Antiquarians, Walpole’s relationship with eighteenth-century antiquarianism was complicated. The work of more serious eighteenth-century antiquarians, such as William Stukeley (founder and secretary of the Society of Antiquaries, 1717–26) and Richard Gough (director of the Society, 1771–97) has often been overshadowed by the narrative flair and ‘sparkle’ of Walpole’s antiquarian works, which consisted mainly of his Catalogue of Royal and Noble Authors (1758), Anecdotes of Painting in England (1762–71) and his epistolary criticisms of antiquaries. Whereas Gough’s work was ‘scholarly’ and gave ‘factual ballast to the conjectural vessel of historical narrative’ (Sweet 2004, 190, 188), Walpole was the writer ‘to whom the Middle Ages was a bric-à-brac shop from which he could pick out material for an elegant (and inaccurate) historical essay, or Gothic rococo ornament’ (Piggott 1976, 52). In Literary Historicity, Mack examines how Walpole’s historical attitudes in Otranto are shaped by eighteenth-century antiquarianism. Drawing attention to the ‘emergence of the object as a new kind of historical evidence’ (Mack 2009, 112), she discusses how Walpole’s novel responds to Burkean notions of the sublime and focuses on the supernatural elements of his Gothic narrative. Examining the appearance of Alfonso, the giant helmet and Walpole’s use of the Gothic trope of the discovered manuscript, she argues that Otranto probes the nature of history ‘beyond empirical experience’ (120) and contends that ‘Walpole provides a theory of historical representation’ (129). While this chapter does consider aspects of the past that transcend language, it differentiates itself from Mack’s study by focusing more on how Otranto engages with the epistemological problems of writing history in the eighteenth century.

3. Walpole was capable of serious historical work. In Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of King Richard the Third (1768), he defends Richard III against the common belief that he murdered the Princes in the Tower. Walpole was a Ricardian and brought this ancient controversy back to public attention. There were numerous responses to his Historic Doubts. The President of the Antiquarian society, Jeremiah Millis, severely undermined Walpole’s principal documentary evidence. Walpole was hurt by this and soon
afterwards resigned his membership to the society. Walpole also reacted to Hume’s thoughts on his *Historic Doubts* (see note below). Published from 1762, Walpole’s *Anecdotes of Painting in England*—a work which details a number of English painters, sculptors and architects—also reveals his commitment to more serious historical work.

4. In his influential *Narrative Form in History and Fiction*, Leo Braudy argues that Hume’s approach to history changes during the composition of *The History of England* (1970, 31–90). Throughout this section, I synthesise and develop a number of Braudy’s thoughts regarding Hume’s diverse historiographical strategies.

5. Hume’s philosophy is sceptical in the sense that it undermines the rationalist perception of human nature by profoundly questioning the power and capacity of the human intellect. Hume described his own *A Treatise of Human Nature* as being ‘very sceptical’ in that it ‘tends to give us a notion of the narrow limits of human understanding’ (1938, 24). Furthermore, his scepticism informs both his philosophy and history. As Hume writes in his essay, ‘The Sceptic’, scepticism ensures that life is not reduced to ‘exact rule and method’ (1825, 177).

6. As this thesis is not directly concerned with textual issues, the most readily available edition of Hume’s *The History of England* has been used throughout: in this instance, the six volume Liberty Fund edition edited by William B. Todd (see Abbreviations).

7. Recording intriguing eighteenth-century sayings, fashions, incidents and other events of a trifling nature, Walpole’s letters themselves provide an alternative mode of historiography. Despite being one of his harshest critics, even Thomas Macaulay notes that Walpole’s correspondence with Sir Horace Mann contains ‘much information concerning the history of that time: the portion of English History of which common readers know the least’ (Macaulay 1861, 269). The relationship between the Gothic, letters and the past will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

8. Hume actually wrote *The History of England* in reverse order, starting with the present and working backwards. Initially titled *The History of Great Britain*, the first volumes published contained the history of the Stuarts, followed by two Tudor volumes. Two medieval volumes followed these. It is plausible that Walpole had read all six volumes of Hume’s historical work before writing *Otranto*, which was first published in 1764. Hume renamed his work *The History of England* after the publication of the medieval volumes and changed the chronology of the volumes: volume one now detailed the history of medieval England and volume six contained the history of the Stuarts.

9. Walpole is most likely referring to either the Stuart or Tudor volumes of *The History of England* in this letter.

10. Walpole knew Hume and corresponded with him. Early letters between the two date from around 1758. However, Walpole did not rate Hume’s conversation, revealing that ‘he understood nothing till he had written upon it’ (1937–83, 16: 266). He also argues that, as a philosopher, Hume was a ‘superficial mountebank’ (42: 78). Walpole visited Paris at the time Hume was British Ambassador for France. In the winter of 1765–66, a popular subject of conversation in Paris was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who had left Switzerland after public disputes. He believed himself to be the victim of an elaborate conspiracy, and sought congenial refuge, which Hume intended to provide by taking him to Britain. In the midst of these
transactions, Walpole wrote a letter from Frederick II to Rousseau inviting him to take shelter in Prussia. The letter satirised Rousseau’s paranoia, created a commotion in Paris, and provoked a furious reaction from the latter, who came to suspect that Hume himself had been involved. Walpole and Hume corresponded on the controversy and the latter (rather magnanimously) dismissed the episode ‘as a piece of levity’ (Hume 1932, 2: 10). In 1769, Hume wrote a critique of Walpole’s *Historic Doubts* (1768) entitled ‘Sixteen Notes on Walpole’s Historic Doubts’, which appeared in the French periodical *Mémoires littéraires de la Grande Bretagne*. Hume later integrated his ‘Sixteen Notes’ into a lengthy note to Chapter 26 of his *The History of England*. Walpole heard about (and maybe even read) Hume’s forthcoming critique and was unhappy about it: he wrote to a friend, ‘Mr. Hume shall publish a few remarks he has made on my book—they are very far from substantial, yet still better than any other trash that has been written against it, nothing of which deserves an answer’ (1937–83, 1: 133–34). However, once the work had been published, Walpole’s reaction became very negative. In his *Supplement to the Historic doubts on the life and reign of King Richard III. With remarks on some answers that have been made to that Work* (1769), he defends his original arguments against all of Hume’s contentions. Moreover, he describes Hume’s contentions as ‘vague, unfair, and void of argument’ (Walpole 1829, 197) and accuses him of relying too heavily on questionable historical sources (particularly those by Thomas More and Francis Bacon).

11. Walpole was opposed to the recent, eighteenth-century trend towards Catholic emancipation, as his comment in a letter to Mann in 1784 indicates: ‘You know I have ever been averse to toleration of an intolerant religion’ (1937–83, 25: 541). However, one must be careful about reading such a view into *Otranto* or generalising about the Gothic’s representations of the Catholic faith. As Robert Miles points out, the Gothic’s relationship with Catholicism is complex and cannot be reduced to a single binary opposition of Protestant and Catholic, British and European. Gothic representations of Catholicism frequently prey on the insecurities of Protestant readers and it is inaccurate to suggest that all Gothic fiction enacts a ‘chronic anti-Catholicism’ (Miles 2002, 86). In terms of Walpole’s Gothic novel, Miles argues that it ‘is not about, is not a defence of, or an attack on, Catholicism’ (93). Citing the political controversy surrounding Walpole’s father and allusions to the Reformation in the prefaces to *Otranto*, Miles argues that, rather than critiquing Catholicism, the novel is ‘really about legitimacy, or rather lack of it’ (93). For an overview of critical attitudes towards the Gothic’s representations of Catholicism, see Angela Wright’s *Gothic Fiction* (2007, 74–96). Throughout this thesis, I will note the Gothic’s varied responses to Catholicism.

12. As Chapter 4 points out, the conflicting first person accounts that comprise Lee’s *The Recess* have profound implications for Enlightenment historiography and the nature of historical knowledge.

13. Hume is most likely referring to historians such as Thucydides, Herodotus and Gaius Cornelius Tacitus here. Tacitus’s *The Annals of Imperial Rome* was, in particular, a large influence on Hume, providing him with a model for working backwards, instead of forwards, in time. See Hicks’s *Neoclassical History and English Culture: From Clarendon to Hume* (1996, 170–209) for further discussion of how Hume was influenced by classical historians.

14. As I discuss in the following chapters, the lack of social and economic power experienced by women in *Otranto* becomes a subject of intense scrutiny in future Gothic works. This is particularly the case with the Female Gothic novels of Lee and Radcliffe.
15. History, how it is written and what it should achieve, is a particular concern in Fielding’s writings. For example, in the aptly named *The History of Tom Jones*, Fielding conducts an extended meditation on the nature of history and, moreover, considers the complex relationship between history and literature (2005, 73–74). However, in contrast to the Gothic, Fielding’s writings focus predominantly on the perennial goodness of man.

16. Walpole was a Whig and an aristocrat. As this thesis shows in the forthcoming chapters, the term “Gothic” was a highly charged political term throughout the eighteenth century. As a Whig, Walpole believed in the myth of the ancient, Saxon or Gothic constitution: ‘I have for five and forty years acted upon the principles of the constitution as it was settled at the Revolution, the best form of government that I know of in the world, and which made us a free people, a rich people, and a victorious people, by diffusing liberty, protecting property and encouraging commerce’ (1937–83, 29: 351). However, the extent to which such political beliefs influence the past in his Gothic novel remains questionable. There have been numerous studies that examine the politics of the past in *Otranto*. For example, Miles reads *Otranto* as a response to the political plight of his father, Whig Prime Minister Robert Walpole (2003, 60–63). Andrew Smith contends that Walpole’s novel can be read ‘in the context of the economic upheavals which characterised Britain in the eighteenth century, ones in which aristocratic power was progressively replaced by the economies largely generated through international trade which were controlled by, and helped to consolidate, the new middle classes’ (2007, 23). While this is certainly true and issues of political legitimacy loom large in the narrative, the foreign and Catholic setting of Walpole’s novel makes it difficult to identify distinctive Whig political beliefs. As Smith argues, although the novel ‘illustrates some historically specific concerns relating to the aristocracy’ (23), *Otranto*’s political stance on such issues remains ‘ambivalent’ (22). In the following chapter, I will discuss Whig notions of the Gothic constitution in more detail and show how Reeve’s *The Old English Baron* has a much firmer political stance. Due to the fact that Walpole’s political intent in *Otranto* is not clear, this chapter chooses to focus instead on *Otranto* as a reaction to Hume’s work of Enlightenment historiography.
‘[B]ringing this deed of darkness to light’: Representations of the Past in Clara Reeve’s *The Old English Baron* (1778)

The disastrous times do not inspire expense… We are returning to our state of islandhood, and shall have little, I believe, to boast, but of what we have been!

Horace Walpole to William Cole (12 August, 1779)

This is a dark story…

Clara Reeve, *The Old English Baron* (1778)

How many usurpations of provinces and kingdoms do we meet with in history without any miracle interposing to punish the usurpers?


Thirteen years would elapse between *Otranto* and the emergence of the next Gothic novel.¹ Originally published anonymously as *The Champion of Virtue: A Gothic Story* in 1777, Clara Reeve revised and republished her novel as the *The Old English Baron: A Gothic Story* in 1778. Featuring tropes such as fragmented manuscripts, violent pasts, repressed histories, usurpation, imprisonment, confused ancestry, female persecution, suspenseful sequences of action and supernatural phenomena, Reeve set out to tame what she perceived as *Otranto*’s excesses. In the preface to *The Old English Baron*, she declares that her 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 modern Novel’ (*OEB* 2). Walpole’s novel may ‘excite the attention’ and ‘engage the heart’, she argues, but, with its relentless violent and supernatural occurrences, the novel is not kept within the ‘utmost verge of probability’ and ‘palls upon the mind’ (*OEB* 3–4). By locating her own Gothic novel in England rather than abroad, setting the action in an actual historical period—the early reign of Henry VI—and limiting supernatural occurrences, Reeve endeavours to avoid such ‘defects’ (*OEB* 4). Adapting *Otranto*’s plot of usurpation, disinheritance and restoration, Reeve’s novel traces the reinstatement of a virtuous peasant, Edmund Twyford, as the heir of Lovel Castle and the exposure and punishment of the usurping murderer, Sir Walter Lovel, Edmund’s kinsman. Edmund clearly follows in the path of *Otranto*’s Theodore. However, as I will discuss in more detail later, Reeve focuses as much on Edmund’s virtues as his right to reclaim his social position. It is only after numerous testing trials and with the help of a noble knight, Sir Philip Harclay, and a
virtuous master, the Baron Fitz-Owen, that the terrible history that haunts the novel’s present is unearthed and Edmund is restored to his rightful place.

Walpole was unimpressed with Reeve’s reworking of his Gothic novel. ‘Have you seen *The Old Baron*,’ he writes in a letter to Reverend William Mason in April 1778, ‘a Gothic story, professedly written in imitation of *Otranto*, but reduced to reason and probability! It is so probable, that any trial for murder at the Old Bailey would make a more interesting story!’ (1937–83, 28: 381–82). Writing to William Cole in August 1778, he dismisses Reeve’s novel as a work so ‘stripped of the marvellous… except in one awkward attempt at a ghost or two, that it is the most insipid dull nothing you ever saw’.

‘[W]hat makes one doze’, he adds, ‘seldom makes one merry’ (2: 110). Sir Walter Scott held a similar opinion. Nevertheless, in spite of such harsh criticism, *The Old English Baron* proved to be a popular and enduring success. Between 1778 and 1786, Reeve’s Gothic novel went through thirteen editions. It was translated into French twice (1787 and 1800), German once (1789), adapted for the stage by John Broster in his (never acted) *Edmond, Orphan of the Castle* (1799) and abridged in chapbooks. Moreover, in recent decades, Reeve’s long-maligned work has been identified as far more than merely ‘a footnote in literary history’ (Spector 1984, 81). It is now widely acknowledged that Reeve’s showcasing of dreams, providential agency, the restrained supernatural, a haunted apartment with mouldering furniture, an unrepentant villain, secret doors behind tapestries, themes of guilt and her attitude towards history influenced Gothic writers such as William Beckford, Sophia Lee, Ann Radcliffe and beyond. Exhibiting a very different, but no less important, attitude towards history compared to Walpole’s *Otranto* (and many later tales of terror, for that matter), Reeve’s novel marks a significant development in the genesis of Gothic fiction and reveals the diversity of the genre in the eighteenth century.

With interest in Reeve’s life and works having grown in recent years, there is now an extensive body of scholarship on *The Old English Baron*. This chapter seeks to both develop existing scholarship and forge new directions for Reeve criticism. Developing the notion that the Gothic responds to Enlightenment strategies of historical representation, the forthcoming discussion examines the relationship between Reeve’s *The Old English Baron* and Paul M. Rapin de Thoyras’s *History of England*. As this chapter reveals, Reeve was very familiar with this proto-Enlightenment work of historiography. Identifying elements of history that disturb Rapin, the forthcoming discussion argues that such fears gained a new, frightening significance in the context of the American Revolution and that such anxieties are manifest in Reeve’s novel. A number of questions will be posed: how do
Reeve’s own politico-religious attitudes shape the past in *The Old English Baron*, how significant is the revolt of the Thirteen Colonies in terms of the history she writes, and to what extent do Whig historical representational strategies inform the Gothic?

Throughout this chapter, I will discuss *The Old English Baron* as a response to *Otranto* and emphasise how Reeve’s attitude towards the past differs from Walpole’s. What is “Gothic” for Reeve, what aspects of the past does she portray as particularly terrifying and how does her use of the supernatural differ from Walpole’s? Exploring themes such as the family, ancestry, chivalry, violence, the law and female oppression, the forthcoming discussion will show how definitions and conceptions of the “Gothic” are fiercely contested in the eighteenth century. Marking a new direction for Gothic literature, Reeve’s fictional novel is set in an actual historical period. What is the significance of this, why would she choose to set a Gothic novel in the early reign of Henry VI and to what extent is the past featured in the novel shaped by the present? The prefaces to the first and second editions of *The Old English Baron* reveal a great deal about Reeve’s notion of the complex relationship between the Gothic, literature and history, and will be employed as a means of examining the construction of the past in the novel. As the first preface discloses, *The Old English Baron* is presented as a translated script. How does Reeve’s use of the Gothic device of the discovered manuscript differ from Walpole’s and what does it reveal about her attitude towards the past? Before I begin to answer such questions, it is necessary to examine James Watt’s thoughts on Reeve’s novel and his notion of the Loyalist Gothic.

**THE LOYALIST GOTHIC AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION**

In his influential study, *Contesting the Gothic* (1999), Watt identifies *The Old English Baron* as an example of what he calls the Loyalist Gothic: an often critically neglected yet significant strain of Gothic works which were particularly prominent in the 1790s and early 1800s. Dating from around the time of the British defeat in America, but growing in popularity once the French Revolution had turned violent in the mid-1790s, he argues that these ‘little-known works rely upon an English medieval setting’, serve ‘an unambiguous moral and patriotic agenda’ and ‘privilege the didactic potential of romance’ (1999, 7). These Gothic works centre on glorious, English Protestant histories rather than on backward European, Catholic pasts. Such Gothic tales are usually set in actual historical periods, rather than in the vague historical setting employed by Walpole in *Otranto*, and tend to explore a different aspect of the “Gothic.” Rather than conjuring up images of barbarism and savagery, these authors use it to take one back to ‘the “dark ages” of the
English medieval period’ and viewed it as a ‘purer expression of English national identity than the neo-classical present’ (Heiland 2004, 4). Citing the significance of the American Revolution (1775–83) and the crisis of British patriotism and national identity that it triggered, Watt contends that *The Old English Baron* is a ‘prototype of the Loyalist Gothic’ (1999, 50). This chapter supports this notion. A prominent theme of Loyalist Gothic narratives that Watt identifies—and one that, as the forthcoming discussion will reveal, features prominently in *The Old English Baron*—is the fear of ‘constitutional degeneration’ (1999, 59). This is linked with the chaotic cultural context in which the novel was written.

The revolt of the Thirteen Colonies, which was in full swing by the writing of *The Old English Baron*, rocked Britain’s colonial power and asked awkward questions about Britain’s own political and constitutional makeup. National insecurities were only exacerbated when the old enemy, France, joined the American revolt in 1777. Linda Colley eloquently conveys the sense of political, constitutional and religious angst triggered by events taking place across the Atlantic when she argues that the American Revolution caused Britons ‘to look anxiously and inquiringly inwards’ (1992, 4) and left ‘many Englishmen with the sense that part of their history and collective identity had been brutally amputated’ (141). A particular point of conflict for the Americans was the relationship between Parliament and the monarchy. As Colley points out, the colonies questioned Parliament’s right to tax them: their allegiance was owing to the King of England alone and, in terms of taxation, only their own elected colonial assemblies had the right to demand it of them (136). The revolt of the Thirteen Colonies brutally exposed Britain’s failure to ‘build an effective structure of royal authority and administration in their American colonies’ and revealed fissures in Britain’s constitutional monarchy (136). Indeed, the American Revolution drew a clear distinction between royal authority and Parliamentary authority; a division that did not sit well with the British (and particularly Whigs) on the other side of the Atlantic (136). As Walpole’s epigraph to this chapter demonstrates, with the time-honoured or “Gothic” constitution brutally undermined by the transgressions taking place across the Atlantic, there were widespread fears that Britain could regress into insignificant islandhood and internal conflict. The turbulent cultural context at home only heightened such fears.

Debates about Britishness and national identity raged before and during the time Reeve was writing *The Old English Baron*. As Colley notes (1992, 112), men and women struggled to come to terms with the unprecedented and expensive victory and new imperial
responsibilities in the wake of the turbulent aftermath of the Seven Years War (1756–63). Gary Kelly notes how (1999, 1: xiii), as well as the revolt of the American colonies, issues over the imperial administration of India, dissenters’ campaigns for full citizenship and religious toleration, economic reform of government and the reduction of the crown and court’s powers of patronage destabilised notions of British national identity. At home and abroad, conceptions of “Englishness” were severely challenged and Protestant beliefs in England’s destiny as a nation and world-power were shaken. A particularly notable response to this was the tumultuous campaign launched by John Wilkes and his supporters, who fought for the reinstatement of ancient English liberties and new English rights during the 1760s and beyond. “Wilkes and Liberty” became a slogan for his campaign and, as Colley points out, he ‘functioned as an English nationalist administering comfort to people in a flux’ (1992, 117). Wilkes’s campaign supported the notion that Britain was an exceptional nation, blessed by God with a unique degree of freedom. Arguing that Reeve’s Gothic novel can be read not only as a retort to Wapole’s Otranto, but as a response to Rapin’s History of England—the themes of which became more resonant with the political situation at home and abroad—the forthcoming discussion will show how the fifteenth-century past of Reeve’s Gothic novel also represents a complex reaction to its tumultuous cultural context. I will begin with an examination of two Gothic themes that are central to Reeve’s fictional past: religion and the supernatural. Before doing so, it is necessary to examine Rapin’s history and its religious views.

RAPIN, WALPOLE AND REEVE: THE GOTHIC, PROVIDENCE AND THE PAST
As I discussed in the introduction, Rapin’s The History of England was very popular in the eighteenth century and, with its critical treatment of primary sources and simple style of narration, contributed to the development of Enlightenment historiography. A particularly notable aspect of Rapin’s proto-Enlightenment history is its aversion and general disinterest in religious and ecclesiastical history. As Laird Okie notes, Rapin possessed a ‘secular, anti-clerical tone, which distinguished it from the theistic, super-historical themes of previous histories’ (1991, 47). More interested in political and constitutional history, religion plays a relatively small part in the History of England. As Okie points out, in his history of Tudor England, Rapin says almost nothing about the ecclesiastical and theological problems that divided various religious groups (60). Moreover, what Rapin has to say about the clergy is usually critical and, in the course of his history, there is very little discussion of the religious disputes between Puritans and Arminians, Presbyterians and
Anglicans, Low Church and High Church (60). Perhaps the most significant aspect of the
History of England is Rapin’s reluctance to appeal to providential or divine agency for
explanations of certain historical events. This is not to say that he did not believe in
providence or that the History of England rejects divine agency altogether. For example,
speaking of the death of Henry V, Rapin argues that it was probably the ‘particular
direction of divine providence’ (H 5: 207). Furthermore, Rapin was a Huguenot and
certainly believed that human history was preordained by God. However, throughout the
History of England, references to providence are infrequent and, as the following quotation
exemplifies, he is sceptical of histories based entirely on religious and supernatural
grounds:

> [C]an it be affirmed that it concerns God’s honour to punish in an exemplary and
supernatural manner the heinous acts of injustice committed in the world? How many
usurpations of provinces and kingdoms do we meet with in history without any miracle
interposing to punish the usurpers? (H 5: 472–73)

Despite believing in God and appealing to providence at certain intervals in his history,
Rapin does not believe that ‘history should or could be written’ to highlight (exclusively)
the workings of divine providence (Okie 1991, 60). Miracles, providential interventions
and supernatural displays of divine power are not considered fit for historical discussion.
For Rapin, history should demonstrate a sharper awareness of historical change by
recording long-term developments such as the growing power of Parliament and the rise of
political parties. Indeed, it is Rapin’s secularisation of the historical cause that proved so
influential for future Enlightenment, philosophical historians such as Hume. As Okie
points out (64), by reducing the omnipresence of God and the Church in the historical
domain, the History of England cleared a path for future Enlightenment historians to
examine social, economic and political change. More significantly in terms of the current
discussion, however, Rapin’s historical attitudes had a significant impact on Reeve, the
Gothic and the past constructed in The Old English Baron.

Reeve had certainly read Rapin’s history. At ‘an age when few people of either sex
can read’, writes Reeve in a letter to a friend, ‘[m]y father… made me read Rapin’s History
of England’ (Reeve 1829). However, similarly to Walpole’s attitude towards Hume’s The
History of England, Reeve was not exactly enamoured with Rapin’s work: ‘the information
it gave, made amends for its dryness’, she writes (Reeve 1829). From a very early age,
Reeve’s historical views were shaped by Tindal’s popular translation of Rapin’s history.
Furthermore, it is beyond doubt that her reading of Rapin shaped her creative works. At the
beginning of her later historical novel, *Memoirs of Sir Roger de Clarendon* (1793), Reeve acknowledges him in a list of ‘historians consulted in this work’ (1793, 1: xxiv). *The Old English Baron* can be read as a complex response not only to Walpole’s *Otranto*, but to Rapin’s proto-Enlightenment historical attitudes in the *History of England*.

Since its inception, the Gothic has been transfixed with the supernatural and divine agency. *Otranto* proliferates with such occurrences. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Walpole reacted to Hume’s excision of the supernatural, divine intervention and miracles from the historical realm by filling his Gothic novel with such instances. As Reeve notes in her preface to the second edition of *The Old English Baron*, such examples include a ‘sword so large as to require an hundred men to lift it’, a ‘helmet that by its own weight forces a passage through a court-yard into an arched vault’, a ‘picture that walks out of its frame’ and a ‘skeleton ghost in a hermit’s cowl’ (*OEB* 3). Long-held religious prophecies such as the notion that the ‘sins of fathers are visited on their children to the third and fourth generation’ (*O 6*), are seemingly fulfilled in *Otranto* and human actors are manipulated by forces outside of their control. It is also important to note that the past Walpole constructs in his Gothic novel is Catholic; the proliferation of paranormal occurrences serve to undermine and castigate what many eighteenth-century Protestants perceived as a backward, superstitious religious order that dominated southern Europe. Set in fifteenth-century England and translated from a manuscript originally written in old English (or so Reeve would have us believe), *The Old English Baron* utilises the Gothic’s focus on divine agency for a different purpose. As the above quotation suggests, Reeve disapproves of Walpole’s frequent use of the supernatural. Even though the past constructed in Walpole’s novel is Catholic, it is aimed at a Protestant audience and poses questions about God and divine agency in history and human life. The random nature of supernatural occurrences and acts of divine intervention in *Otranto* conflict with elements of Christian teachings and providential models of human history.

In *The Old English Baron*, we can detect a dual movement against the secularisation of the historical cause in Rapin’s history and the religious ambiguity that surrounds the past featured in *Otranto*. Writing at a time when the American Revolution challenged deeply held Protestant beliefs that Britain was an elect nation marked out by God and that its destiny was shaped by an overruling providence, the secularisation of the historical cause in Rapin’s history was brought into sharper focus. Believing that strong Christian faith is vital to Britain at a time of national crisis, Reeve writes a past that is governed by providence. Exploiting the Gothic’s focus on the supernatural, divine
Christian intervention dominates the fifteenth-century past constructed in Reeve’s Loyalist Gothic novel. In what is a short novel, there are approximately twelve references to providence, twenty-eight references to God, and forty-nine references to heaven in The Old English Baron. Harclay declares that Edmund, the novel’s hero, is the ‘child of providence!—the beloved of heaven!’ (OEB 75) and believes that he is an ‘instrument of justice in the hand of Heaven!’ (OEB 90). ‘Heaven has in its own way made him the instrument to discover the death of his parents’, he adds (OEB 89). The Baron Fitz-Owen argues that ‘Heaven effects its purposes in its own time and manner’ (OEB 98), whilst even the villain of the novel, Sir Walter Lovel, comes to recognise that ‘nothing can be concealed from the eye of Heaven’ (OEB 92). After exhuming the body of Lord Lovel, Father Oswald (a religious servant of the Baron Fitz-Owen) declares that the discovery is the work of providence: ‘Behold the day of retribution! of triumph to the innocent, of shame and confusion to the wicked’ (OEB 116). Using Gothic fiction as an imaginative protest against increasingly secular eighteenth-century historiography, Reeve restores religion and Christian, providential agency to the past. This is underscored at the end of the novel when Reeve states that the events of the novel function as a ‘striking lesson to posterity, of the over-ruling hand of Providence, and the certainty of RETRIBUTION’ (OEB 136).

In contrast to Otranto’s superstitious past and Rapin’s secular history, the past constructed in The Old English Baron reflects a ‘Christian universe’ (Ehlers 1978, 76). As Leigh Ehlers points out, the ‘characters in The Old English Baron replay the Christian history of man; the Lovel family moves in a linear or straightforward fashion through a three-stage progression, with no significant digressions, from “glory,” to “ruin” to “restoration”’ (1978, 65). The past in The Old English Baron follows a providential pattern and takes the hero, Edmund, from a position of initial security, to a period of hardship where his faith is severely tested, to a phase of purgation of weakness and sin. He is then rewarded with a position of restored security and victory over his enemies (65). Reeve directs the mystery and awe that surrounds the supernatural occurrences in Walpole’s Catholic Gothic past towards contemplations of God and the workings of Christian providence. For example, whilst sleeping at Wyatt’s cottage, Harclay is awestruck by ‘many strange and incoherent dreams’ (OEB 11). His old friend, Arthur Lovel, appears to speak to him and leads him to a ‘dark and frightful cave’ where ‘dismal groans’ are heard and Harclay beholds ‘a complete suit of armour stained with blood’ (OEB 11). This dream turns out to be prophetic and an example of divine intervention. At various points in the
narrative, Oswald declares that the ‘ways of providence are wonderful’ (OEB 45). Harclay exclaims, ‘Praise be to God for his wonderful doings towards the children of men!’ (OEB 76), whilst, in a letter, Lord Clifford compels his addressee to ‘unite with us in wondering at the ways of providence’ (OEB 96). Since its genesis with the publication of Otranto, the Gothic has been obsessed with the mystery of being and the seemingly irrational forces that drive human history. Reeve hijacks this aspect of the Gothic for strictly Christian ends and to encourage readers to contemplate the wonders of Christian providence. Drawing a parallel between Edmund’s struggles and England’s current plight at home and abroad, Reeve shows how, throughout history, England has avoided a succession of disasters and escapes; she reminds Britons of who they are and reassures them of their privileged place in God’s providential scheme.

To use the words of Aubrey Williams, history in The Old English Baron is controlled by providence and, in marked contrast to Rapin’s proto-Enlightenment History of England, works ‘in and through human choices and natural events, through chance encounters and strange accidents, through improbable mishaps and fantastic coincidences’ (1971, 284). As Ehlers points out (1978, 69), similarly to Otranto, Reeve’s Gothic novel is replete with seemingly random occurrences. For example, with his (foster) father, Andrew Twyford, weary of supporting his adopted child, Edmund is taken into the Baron Fitz-Owen’s service ‘just in the nick’ (OEB 53). This is just one of many ‘seemingly accidental circumstances’ that leads the hero ‘imperceptibly towards the crisis of his fate’ (OEB 27).

It is fortunate that Margery Twyford (Edmund’s foster mother) preserves the ear-rings, necklace and locket worn by Edmund’s mother (OEB 54). These mementos function as ‘strong and indisputable’ proofs of his identity (OEB 54). When Edmund has to spend a night in the haunted apartment, he just happens to discover and gain access to two hidden rooms which contain vital clues to his identity and the bloody misdeeds that led to his father’s death (OEB 36). As I discussed in the previous chapter, Walpole’s Otranto focused on fortuitous discoveries and random occurrences to reject the role of chance in Hume’s The History of England. Such events serve an entirely different purpose in The Old English Baron. Events in Reeve’s Loyalist Gothic novel may appear to be random acts of chance, but throughout they turn out to be instances of the foreknowing and protective care of God, who shapes the past and ensures that Edmund is restored to his rightful place. As Edmund declares, even though God’s ways may seem mysterious at first, ‘Providence will in its own time vindicate its ways to man’ (OEB 30). Reeve adopts the Gothic’s obsession with complex plots and acts of chance to underscore the mysterious, complex
workings of Christian providence in human life and history. Rebelling against the marginalisation of God in Rapin’s *History of England*, Reeve exploits the Gothic’s fascination with chance in order to imaginatively reunite history and theology. Furthermore, the past constructed in the *The Old English Baron* has a strong moral purpose, as will be demonstrated.

**SUPERNATURAL PASTS: PROVIDENCE AND REEVE’S DIDACTIC GOTHIC**
The providential past constructed in *The Old English Baron* is a reflection not only of Reeve’s own, deeply held Christian beliefs, but her attitude towards romance. Reeve’s later work, *The Progress of Romance* (1785) is useful here. In this remarkable work of literary history and criticism, Reeve traces the romance to its origins and defends it against the Augustan Age’s tendency to ‘decry and ridicule them’ (1785, 1: 105). She raises the profile of this much-derided form of literature by showing how the ‘modern Novel sprung out of its ruins’ (1: 8) and by concluding that ‘Epic Poetry is the parent of Romance’ (1: 25); she criticises those who ‘despise and ridicule Romances, as the most contemptible of all kinds of writing, and yet expatiate in raptures… on stories far more wild and extravagant’ when those stories are written by ancient poets (1: 21). However, championing this often ridiculed form of literature, Reeve has reservations concerning some types of romance. She is particularly alarmed by ones that utilise historical detail. ‘In the days of Gothic ignorance’, she writes, ‘these Romances might, perhaps, be read by many persons as true Histories, and might therefore more easily affect their manners’ (1: 57). In Reeve’s view, such tales are potentially harmful to society. Romances should have a didactic purpose and possess a strong ‘moral tendency’ (1: 97).

Indulging in aesthetic excess, imaginative flights of fancy and resisting moral frameworks of understanding, it is not difficult to see how Walpole’s *Otranto* conflicts with Reeve’s religious beliefs and aesthetic values. Vague in its religious attitudes and morality, Reeve disapproved of Walpole’s Gothic past; it is an example of a romance that can ‘become an instrument to corrupt the manners and morals of mankind’ (*OEB* 2). However, despite such reservations, Reeve did not entirely condemn Walpole’s ‘attempt to unite the various merits and graces of the ancient Romance and modern Novel’ (*OEB* 3). It is the religious ambiguity and lack of a clear moral message that disturbs Reeve above all else. Her aim in *The Old English Baron* is to construct a past which still ‘excite[s] the attention’, but, in contrast to the reckless extravagance of *Otranto*, directs the Gothic to ‘some useful, or at least innocent, end’ (*OEB* 3). This would become a key aspect of future
Loyalist Gothic works. Richardsonian in tone, the Gothic takes a turn towards didacticism in Reeve’s hands. In Reeve’s view, all romances—including the Gothic—must have a strong social purpose and promote virtue and morality.

As this section has contended so far, Reeve’s Loyalist Gothic novel can be read as a reaction to both Otranto and Rapin’s History of England. Before I examine how her religious, didactic principles shape the past constructed in The Old English Baron, it is important to consider the moral implications of Rapin’s History of England. As I discussed previously, throughout Rapin’s work, religious history is neglected in favour of political analysis. For example, in his discussion of Henry VI’s reign, Rapin cites the effects of the unscrupulous behaviour of certain individuals and political conflict for his downfall: ‘After the death of the Duke of Bedford, Henry suffered himself to be guided by the Cardinal of Winchester and the Duke of Suffolk, who… minding only their own affairs, completed his ruin’ (H 5: 449). Possessed of ‘uncommon abilities’, Queen Margaret has the opportunity to ‘put his affairs again in a flourishing condition’ (H 5: 449). However, uninterested in the ‘honour of the King, and welfare of the nation’, her ‘sole view was to engross all the power, and make use of the King’s name to justify her passions’, writes Rapin (H 5: 449). Indeed, human nature is often presented at its worst and most immoral in the History of England, particularly in Rapin’s discussion of the political wrangling of Henry VI’s minority government. Furthermore, as Rapin’s quotation from earlier demonstrates, acts of usurpation in the historical domain often happen ‘without any miracle interposing to punish the usurpers’ (H 5: 472–73). Anticipating future Enlightenment works of history, Rapin’s History of England destabilises the traditional role of history. History may still teach valuable lessons in statecraft, but, by focusing on political rather than religious issues, its role as a teacher of morality was cast into doubt. This has significant implications for The Old English Baron. Reeve’s remarks in the preface can be read as a response to Rapin’s work of historiography: ‘History represents human nature as it is in real life; alas, too often a melancholy retrospect!’, she laments (OEB 2). Contrasting with Walpole’s use of Gothic romance to focus on the aspects of humankind that Enlightenment historiography represses, Reeve sees it as an opportunity to exhibit the more benevolent aspects of humanity: ‘Romance displays only the amiable side of the picture, it shews the pleasing features, and throws a veil over the blemishes’ (OEB 2). Utilising tropes such as the supernatural and divine intervention, The Old English Baron aims to direct the Gothic to ‘good and useful purposes’ (OEB 2) and to defy Rapin’s proto-Enlightenment work of historiography by making the past a teacher of key Christian values such as humility,
endurance, modesty, compassion, justice, forgiveness and reverence. Bolstering English national identity at a troubled time, Reeve constructs a past that portrays England as a free and distinctive country; a nation which, strong in Christian faith, is able to keep alien and arbitrary rule at bay. Her use of the supernatural is telling here.

Concerned with the frequency of ghostly instances in *Otranto*, Reeve deliberately limits her use of the supernatural in *The Old English Baron*. Nevertheless, there are numerous paranormal instances in Reeve’s fictional past and they are very significant in terms of understanding her Loyalist Gothic construction of history. A particularly notable example involves the Baron Fitz-Owen’s kinsmen, Wenlock and Markham. After Edmund’s mysterious disappearance from a ruinous room in an abandoned wing of the Castle Lovel, the Baron Fitz-Owen compels them to spend a night in the same apartment. Before examining this paranormal episode, it is important to note that, prior to this event, these two resent Edmund’s virtue and the consequent praise and attention he receives from the Baron Fitz-Owen. Jealous of the preference Emma (the Baron Fitz-Owen’s daughter) shows for Edmund, Wenlock spreads disparaging rumours about him and seeks to sully his character with the ‘sin of ingratitude’ (*OEB* 20). Wenlock is the chief offender. During their military exploits in France, he hatches a plan to have Edmund killed and, when this fails and Edmund is about to be awarded a knighthood for his valiant actions, he is sure to remind the Regent that such an honour ‘cannot be conferred on a peasant’ (*OEB* 25). He also attempts to lower Edmund in the Baron Fitz-Owen’s estimation (*OEB* 27). As the action progresses, Wenlock’s and Markham’s relationship becomes increasingly fraught and reaches breaking point during their enforced stay in the haunted apartment. Shortly after entering the room, they both rise ‘with the resolution to fight’, but, just as they are about to do so, they hear ‘a dismal groan from the room underneath’ (*OEB* 68). Both men stand ‘like statues petrified by fear, yet listening with trembling expectation’ (*OEB* 68). A few moments later, all the doors ‘flew open, a pale glimmering light appeared at the door from the staircase, and a man in compleat armour entered the room’ (*OEB* 68). The phantom points to the door and they crawl away ‘as fast as fear would let them’ (*OEB* 68). Having escaped, Wenlock is described as ‘half dead’ and Markham as ‘half distracted’ (*OEB* 69). In the past constructed in *The Old English Baron*, those who do not live good Christian lives are subject to the terror of the supernatural. Those who fail to live up to Christian values are punished.

This supernatural scene is in stark contrast to Edmund’s first experience in the haunted apartment. During his first night in the chamber, Edmund hears a ‘hollow rustling
noise like that of a person coming through a narrow passage’ *(OEB 36).* Similarly to his enemies, Wenlock and Markham, he is initially struck with ‘fear’; ‘all the concurrent circumstances of his situation struck upon his heart’, writes Reeve, ‘and gave him a new disagreeable sensation’ *(OEB 36).* However, recollecting his virtuosity and Christian values, Edmund puts his faith in God: ‘What should I fear? I have not wilfully offended God or man; why then should I doubt protection?’ *(OEB 36).* In contrast to the malevolent actions of his enemies, Edmund does not react in terror; he gains courage by staying strong in his Christian faith and ‘resigning himself wholly to the will of Heaven’ *(OEB 36).* During the second night in the haunted apartment, Edmund, Joseph and Father Oswald descend to the lower rooms of the castle’s abandoned wing. Edmund discovers his father’s blood stained armour and, shortly after surmising that the person that owned this armour lies buried under the floorboards, a ‘dismal hollow groan was heard as if from underneath’ *(OEB 46).* ‘A solemn silence ensued, and marks of fear were visible upon all three; the groan was thrice heard’, writes Reeve *(OEB 46).* However, following Oswald’s example, all three kneel, praying for the direction of heaven and for the ‘soul of the departed’ *(OEB 46).* As a result, the groaning ceases, their fears subside and they are able to continue their endeavours to restore Edmund to his rightful place. In the medieval past depicted in *The Old English Baron*, those who lack virtue feel the fear and wrath of the supernatural whilst those who live virtuous Christian lives and remain constant in their beliefs do not.

Exploiting the imaginative potential of the Gothic and directing the supernatural for didactic ends, Reeve tightens the loose moral framework of Walpole’s *Otranto*. Those that reject Christian values and are consumed by jealousy, hatred and revenge (such as Wenlock) are hindered by the supernatural whilst those who remain virtuous, even during times of immense hardship (such as Edmund), are aided by it. For example, whilst sleeping in the haunted apartment, Edmund is visited by his dead parents in a dream: a ‘Warrior, leading a Lady by the hand’ seemingly enters his apartment and declare that he is their child *(OEB 38).* This quasi-supernatural experience enables him to realise his true identity. When Edmund returns to Lovel Castle as the rightful master the ‘great folding doors into the hall’ are ‘opened without any assistance’ *(OEB 115).* When he enters the hall, ‘every door in the house flew open’ *(OEB 115).* Whilst the servants are terrified by such an occurrence, Oswald reassures everyone that this is an act of divine intervention and that the doors have opened of their own accord ‘to receive their master’ *(OEB 115).* As Ehlers notes, ‘ghosts work to Edmund’s providential advantage’ in *The Old English Baron* *(1978,*
Revolting against Rapin’s history, an act of usurpation is punished with providentially orchestrated ghosts and miracles ‘interposing to punish’ the usurpers (H 5: 473).

Utilising the imaginative and historical potential of the Gothic and placing its supernatural tropes into a strictly Protestant framework, Reeve combats the increasingly secular nature of eighteenth-century historiography by restoring history to one of its most traditional, pre-Enlightenment roles: as a teacher of Christian morality. In contrast to Otranto, The Old English Baron is very concerned with the morality of history and features a number of exemplary Christians. Throughout the novel, Harclay acts as a ‘Christian soldier’ (OEB 10), the Baron Fitz-Owen is predominantly noble in his actions, William is steadfast in his belief in Providence and Edmund is a model of Christian virtue. Furthermore, as Ehlers points out, Reeve allows her most virtuous characters the fullest and most sentimental development in The Old English Baron (1978, 72). For example, Harclay and Edmund are often described as shedding ‘tears of affection’ (OEB 129) whilst her villains remain unrepentant; when offered a chance of salvation, Walter Lovel (the novel’s villain) still attempts to escape (OEB 118), whilst Wenlock is described as a ‘serpent’ and is furious when he is exiled (OEB 83–84). Not only are responses to the supernatural an index of characters’ Christian faith, but, as Ehlers notes, Reeve’s ‘appeal to sentiment coexists with the appeal to providence’ (1978, 72). Indeed, in Reeve’s fictional fifteenth-century past, Christian values such as humility, piety, endurance, thankfulness, compassion, forgiveness and justice triumph over ignorance, fear, and vice. By the novel’s end, Christian grace and magnanimity have been bestowed on the undeserving sinner, Walter, who is exiled to a ‘very distant part of the world’ (OEB 119) rather than executed, and the virtuous, namely Edmund, Harclay and the Baron Fitz-Owen, are rewarded with long and happy lives. Defying Rapin’s history and Walpole’s ambivalent, fictional past, Reeve utilises Gothic romance as a means of writing a past that is worthy of imitation. To use Reeve’s words from elsewhere, her primary aim in The Old English Baron is to ‘support the cause of morality, to reprove vice, and to promote all the social and domestic virtues’ (1788, 1: xiii). Writing in a time of national crisis and responding to what she perceives as a corrupt political regime at home, Reeve writes a Loyalist Gothic past that provides a good model of Protestant, Christian behaviour and government.

CONFLICTED PASTS: RAPIN AND WHIG HISTORY

Now that I have discussed the religious aspects of Reeve’s novel, I will focus on the politics of the past in The Old English Baron. Before doing so, it is requisite to examine
Rapin’s political orientations in the *History of England*. Whilst Rapin’s history reveals strong, proto-Enlightenment historiographical methodologies, it is also a significant work of Whig historiography. As Okie remarks, with its anti-clerical emphasis, Whig history played a major role in the development of Enlightenment historiography (1991, 6). Having fought with William III in Ireland, Rapin was pensioned by the crown and served as tutor to the son of William’s Dutch favourite, the Duke of Portland. Portland was a diplomat and ally of the Whigs and owned a vast collection of historical works. Rapin was heavily influenced by these histories and published his *Dissertation sur les Whigs et les Torsys* (*An Historical Dissertation upon Whig and Tory*) in 1717; a political treatise based on his close observation of court politics in William’s reign.12 As Okie argues, although Rapin was ‘able to step back from the party fray and deliver verdicts on previous historians with relative detachment’, his *History of England* has a ‘clear Whig slant’ (57).13 Indeed, Rapin’s work is Whiggish in several of the ways outlined by Herbert Butterfield in *The Whig Interpretation of History*. Conforming to Whig political principles, Rapin refutes Tory historians by advocating the power of Parliament rather than the king and stressing the rise of constitutional government, personal freedom and liberty. One of the main characteristics of Whig history is the identification of the past as a site of conflict. This is certainly the case with Rapin’s *History of England*, where representatives of the modern and progressive are constantly fighting against archaic and reactionary forces.

Rapin’s representation of the conflict between the Magna Carta Barons and King John serves to illustrate this point. Taxed heavily by John, the Barons ‘saw him daily usurping an arbitrary power, which made them apprehensive of his having formed a design against their liberties’ (*H* 3: 166). Fighting a tyrannical leader in an archaic context, Rapin identifies the Barons as modernisers. Frustrated by John’s injustice towards them, they form designs to curtail his power and ‘bound themselves by oath, to exert their utmost endeavours to obtain the re-establishment of their ancient privileges, and mutually to stand by one another’ (*H* 3: 211). The Barons political stance accords with Rapin’s Whig politics and he heralds their cause: ‘[t]his is the first league or confederacy which was ever made in England against the King, in defence of the liberties of the nation’ (*H* 3: 211). ‘This charter’, lauds Rapin, ‘contained in substance the liberties which the people of England enjoyed during the dominion of the Saxon Kings’ (*H* 3: 217). Treasuring the constitutional monarchy in the present, Rapin heaps praise on the Barons’ refusal to ‘submit to an absolute power’ (*H* 3: 166) and heralds the Magna Carta (he even attaches a copy of it to the end of volume three). Despite John’s (and a number of his successors’) attempts to get
them annulled, from ‘that time forward these two charters have been the basis and foundation of the English Liberties’, argues Rapin (H 3: 224). To adapt Butterfield’s words, Rapin reads the past through the present and ‘seizes upon those personages and parties in the past whose ideas seem more analogous’ to his own (1951, 29). The historical personages that Rapin admires are ones who he perceives to have furthered progress by spreading liberty and ensuring the survival of ancient freedoms. Indeed, Rapin speaks approvingly of the Magna Carta Barons because these figures from the past are seen to hold present political values. The same applies to certain historical personages in the early reign of Henry VI. Seeking to maintain order and political stability, Rapin praises the Dukes of Bedford and Gloucester for their ‘valour, experience, and wisdom’ (H 5: 208).

In Butterfield’s words, the fervour of Rapin’s work of Whig historiography comes from ‘what is really the transference into the past of an enthusiasm for something in the present, an enthusiasm for democracy or freedom of thought or the liberal tradition’ (1951, 96). The corollary of this is to identify and stigmatisé aspects of the past that do not accord with political ideals held in the present. As Butterfield argues, by writing the past through immediate reference to the present, historical figures become classified into two groups: those personages who ‘furthered progress’ and those who ‘tried to hinder it’ (11). The Magna Carta Barons belong to the former category; Rapin places King John, the enemy of these men, in the latter group. Extorting money, raising taxes, confiscating properties and violating ancient freedoms in order to fund wars in France, Rapin argues that it cannot ‘be denied but that during this time, his subjects had a mortal hatred against him’ (H 3: 242). We learn that John keeps the Barons in a ‘wretched state’ (H 3: 222), seizing their lands and ‘ravaging the kingdom’ (H 3: 230). ‘Instead of regaining their privileges’, writes Rapin, they ‘beheld their estates plundered and given to foreigners whilst the king was glutting himself with the pleasure of revenge’ (H 3: 230). Crafting a distinctly Whig historical narrative, John is the force of anachronism in Rapin’s history of this period; ruling absolute, he views himself as above the law and threatens to drag the barons—agents of liberty and progression—back into the unenlightened, tyrannous past. Although Rapin treats previous histories sceptically and acknowledges that John has been ‘drawn’ in ‘blacker colours than he deserved’ (H 3: 240), he argues that John had ‘scarce any one valuable qualification’ (H 3: 250) and ‘had great faults’ (H 3: 240). Although John does sign the Magna Carta, we learn that he only does so because he ‘had no other course to take’ (H 3: 222) and ‘made as if he willingly granted what in reality was extorted by force’ (H 3: 223). It is the valiant endeavours of the Barons that force the King to respect their
historic rights and privileges, making him subject, rather than superior, to the law. Almost immediately after signing the document, John is ‘eager to find out the means to disentangle himself from a yoke which seemed intolerable’ and he and the Barons are soon afterwards at war (H 3: 225). Conforming to Whig notions of history, John is presented in a negative light largely because his reign is unconstitutional, repressing freedom and liberal thought in Britain. The same applies to Rapin’s treatment of certain historical personages during the reign of Henry VI. Henry’s wife, Margaret, is castigated for acting in violation of the constitution and not helping to save her husband and not caring about the ‘welfare of the nation’ (H 5: 449). Indeed, Rapin writes a past that endorses the Whig values he cherishes in the present.

HISTORICAL PERILS: WHIG HISTORY, REEVE AND THE GOTHIC

In the same letter in which Reeve reveals that she has read Rapin’s History of England, she speaks of her father’s political orientations: ‘My father was an Old Whig; from him I have learned all that I know; he was my oracle’, she writes (Reeve 1829). It is no coincidence that Reeve’s father urged her to read Rapin’s History of England, a work which Caroline Robbins describes as ‘Whig republican in tone’ (2004, 268). Reeve’s political persuasions are very similar to Rapin’s. She also reveals that her father used to make her read ‘Parliamentary debates’ (Reeve 1829). ‘I gaped and yawned over them at the time’, writes Reeve, ‘but, unawares to myself, they fixed my principles once and forever’ (Reeve 1829). Indeed, in political terms, Reeve was an Old Whig. In the sense that Reeve employs it, the term “Old Whig” denotes those Whigs who became disillusioned with Sir Robert Walpole—Horace Walpole’s father and British Prime Minister between 1721–1742—and the means he took to maintain political power. Reeve’s political persuasions have significant implications for the past she constructs in The Old English Baron. In contrast to the aristocrat, Walpole, Reeve came from an educated middle-class background, her father being a curate in Ipswich. Indeed, all of Reeve’s works have strong political persuasions.14 As Kelly notes, in The Old English Baron, Reeve ‘aimed to displace Walpole’s work and its aristocratic and elitist Whig ideology with the more bourgeois-democratic politics she promoted in all her fiction’ (2002, 1: xxxii). The political intent of Walpole’s novel is ambiguous; by the end of the novel, the social order, symbolised by the castle, is destroyed. Furthermore, Walpole merely recognises the legitimacy of the novel’s hero, Theodore. In contrast to this, Reeve gives the Gothic a firm Old Whig political stance. At a time when the nation was collectively assessing its own political makeup in the wake of
rapid colonial expansion and the American Revolution, Reeve—similarly to Rapin—constructs a past that privileges the political values she holds in the present.

The relationship between Whig history and the Gothic has long been recognised. However, because *The Old English Baron* does not stage a conflict between a progressive Protestantism and a regressive Catholicism, many critics have neglected to examine the impact of such historiography on Reeve’s fiction. This is quite surprising considering her overt Whig political beliefs. Indeed, *The Old English Baron* is governed by Whig codes of historical representation. However, in contrast to Rapin, who constructs a progressive narrative and identifies his political counterparts in real historical figures who have furthered progress, Reeve creates ‘an imaginary past of domestic [and] ancestral conflict’ (Mighall 1999, 10). Utilising the Gothic’s focus on dysfunctional families and using the home as a means of commenting on the state, Reeve depicts the heroes and villains of the domestic realm. Similarly to Rapin’s *History of England*, she locates the past as a site of conflict in *The Old English Baron*. From the outset of the novel, Edmund—who is still thought to be the son of a labourer—is marked out by his extraordinary ‘merit’, ‘good qualities’, and ‘extraordinary genius and disposition’ (*OEB* 14). Even though he possesses ‘that inward consciousness that always attends superior qualities’, he constantly reminds himself of his ‘low birth and dependant station’ and controls ‘the flames of ambition’ (*OEB* 21). As Kelly notes, such meritocratic characteristics accord more with late eighteenth-century professional middle-class values than aristocratic qualities of the fifteenth century (2002, 1: lxxvii). Edmund is a model of modesty and virtue and his conduct is exemplary. Indeed, Edmund demonstrates the admirable middle-class virtues of self-reliance and independence: ‘words are all my inheritance’, he declares (*OEB* 21), before arguing that he had ‘nothing but my character to depend on’ (*OEB* 30). Embodying a fusion of Old Whig and bourgeois values treasured by Reeve in the present and conforming to patterns of Whig history, Edmund is identified as the key progressive protagonist in *The Old English Baron*. It is the villainous Walter Lovel who opposes Edmund and functions as the enemy of liberty.

Reminiscent of Manfred in *Otranto*, Walter is a wicked aristocrat and is the root cause of evil in Reeve’s fictional fifteenth-century past. Akin to all the Gothic pasts discussed in this thesis, a macabre history is unearthed in *The Old English Baron*. Many years previously to the novel’s action, Walter commissions the murder of Arthur Lovel, his brother and Edmund’s father. This is the ‘deed of darkness’ that is ‘brought to light’ in the novel (*OEB* 115). Walter’s motivation for having Edmund’s father murdered is particularly
illuminating. ‘My kinsman excelled me in every kind of merit, in the graces of person and mind, in all his exercises, and in every accomplishment’, Walter recounts bitterly (OEB 91). ‘I was totally eclipsed by him, and I hated to be in his company’, he adds (OEB 91). Overcome with ‘bitter hatred’ and ‘revenge’, he exults in the ‘prospect of possessing’ his brother’s ‘title, fortune, and his Lady’ (OEB 92). Earlier in the narrative, Arthur is described as a ‘gentleman of eminent virtues and accomplishments’ (OEB 5). Walter is the antithesis of Edmund (and his father); conforming to Gothic stereotypes of hero and villain he is profoundly corrupt, hateful, revengeful and unrepentant and plays a large part in the death of Edmund’s mother as his advances towards her compel her to escape from his clutches. Whilst doing so, she slips and falls to her death and, in an attempt to cover up her disappearance, he conducts a ‘fictitious funeral’ (OEB 91). Indeed, Walter shows no remorse for the deaths of either of Edmund’s parents. He denies the charges levelled at him by Harclay and tries to escape when he has been made a generous offer to answer to his crimes. Harclay variously calls him a ‘treacherous kinsman’, an ‘assassin of his nearest relation’ and an ‘inhuman monster’ (OEB 78). Walter is a symbol of the corrupt and elitist aristocracy that Reeve perceives as so harmful to her own eighteenth-century social order and the nation’s future and she uses the past as a means to comment on the present and subvert Walpole’s Whig elitism.

Similarly to Rapin’s Whiggish historical work, Reeve maps the present onto the past and places a modern representative in an archaic context. Edmund, the progressive force and hero of liberty in the novel, is pitched against Walter; an enemy of freedom and symbol of the old, elite, corrupt aristocracy. Reeve fuses Whig representational strategies with Gothic conventions in order to present a vision of an aristocracy that is not based on greed or corruption, but one that has assimilated the values of the increasingly mobile eighteenth-century professional middle classes. These include principles of inward merit, moral and intellectual integrity, self-discipline, social responsibility and philanthropy.

Subverting Walpole’s Otranto, Reeve focuses not solely on the hero’s lawful right to rule the Castle Lovel, but the extent to which he deserves such a station. Edmund is fighting against the past and for freedom in the future. Walter—a symbol of the corrupt, old aristocracy—is a symbol of the past and all its evils. Indeed, Walter threatens to drag Edmund—and all the other virtuous characters in the novel—back into the corrupt, violent and unenlightened past. What is particularly striking about the representation of Walter is not only his profound corruption, but the violent means by which he usurps Edmund’s inheritance. Walter relates how his men ‘killed’ Edmund’s father and ‘drew him aside out
of the highway’, before recounting how he then sent them back ‘to fetch the dead body, which they brought privately into the castle’ (*OEB* 92). The gruesome details do not stop here. ‘They tied it neck and heels, and put it into a trunk’, he adds, ‘which they buried under the floor in the closet’ in the abandoned wing of the castle (*OEB* 92). For a Loyalist Gothic novel that does not intend to dwell on violence or gruesome acts, this is quite a surprising level of detail. Constructing a past that assimilates Whig codes of historical representation, Reeve uses Gothic tropes—such as scenes of violence, the unearthing of horrible histories and the focus on inherently evil villains—to emphasise the gulf between the progressive forces of history and the regressive and anachronistic forces that threaten them.

**OLD WHIG REFORM: CLASS AND FEMALE PERSECUTION**

Written at a time of national anxiety and focusing on the evil deeds of Walter (the Gothic villain), *The Old English Baron* encapsulates the worst fears of Old Whigs by depicting the survival of corrupt, barbaric, anachronistic customs and attitudes in the enlightened present. The corrupt and elitist aristocracy which threatens Edmund in the fifteenth century still persists in Reeve’s own age and threatens national stability at a particularly precarious moment. Throughout *The Old English Baron*, the past and the present are intertwined. However, even though Reeve’s medieval past is a site of conflict and is pervaded by eighteenth-century middle class notions of virtue and merit, the novel still endorses a hierarchic social class system. In a later work of historical fiction, Reeve writes that ‘the best government and most likely to be permanent’ is one that ‘makes different ranks and degrees of men necessary to each other, and leads them to co-operate together in order to promote the good of the whole’ (1793, 1: xvii–xviii). Citing the example of Rome and its ‘gradation of ranks during her republican state’, Reeve argues that a ‘form of government founded upon levelling principles, never did, nor ever can continue’ (1793, 1: xviii).

Indeed, utilising the Gothic theme of female persecution, Reeve’s fifteenth-century past depicts the horror of deviation from a hierarchical class structure and ends with the reinstatement of hierarchy in Edmund’s rule as Baron.

By murdering Arthur, Walter disrupts the existing class system and sets in motion a series of disastrous events which have a particularly devastating impact on the lives of the novel’s female characters. Compelled to escape as a result of Walter’s ambition to marry her, Lady Lovel meets a tragic end: on her way to find help during a dark night, her ‘foot slipped, and she fell into the river and was drowned’ (*OEB* 51). Her body is discovered
‘floating upon the water’ under a foot bridge ($OEB$ 51). Walter tells everyone that she dies of madness and, as mentioned previously, conducts a fictional funeral for her ($OEB$ 29). It is only with the discovery of Walter’s involvement in Arthur’s death that this additional ‘deed of darkness’ is unearthed ($OEB$ 115). Edmund is born shortly before his mother’s tragic death and is adopted by a surrogate family. Bitter that the socially displaced Edmund is draining his family resources and is not naturally disposed for manual labour, Andrew (Edmund’s surrogate father) takes out his frustrations on his wife, Margery. We learn that, after Edmund has been taken into the Baron Fitz-Owen’s service, Margery’s attempts to speak to her adopted son are foiled by her husband, Andrew, who physically abuses her: ‘Andrew beat me the last time I spoke to Edmund; and told me he would break every bone in my skin if ever I spoke to him again’ ($OEB$ 50). When the rigid class structure is compromised, the worst of human nature is in evidence and it is women who generally suffer.

As an Old Whig with increasingly bourgeois values, Reeve is not totally averse to the aristocracy. Edmund is, after all, revealed to have been an aristocrat all along. Rather, Reeve calls for a more responsible aristocracy and, as Watt argues, she ‘presents an aristocracy which is redeemable because it is possessed of merit’ and ‘uphold[s] a rigid and hierarchical, if harmonious, system of class relations’ (1999, 48). There are numerous examples of agreeable, yet distinct, class relations in *The Old English Baron*; whether it is the assistance the peasant John Wyatt gives Harclay ($OEB$ 8–10), the servants delight for their true master’s return to the Castle Lovel ($OEB$ 115) or Harclay’s care home for aging soldiers ($OEB$ 130). As Sue Chaplin astutely points out, even though the novel posits meritocracy as the key to domestic and political order, ‘social class nevertheless reasserts itself as a highly significant organising principle and is clearly shown ultimately to retain a link with “worth” which undermines earlier intimations of the existence of a universal moral sense’ (2007, 48). To use Abby Coykendall’s words, Reeve depicts the ‘miraculous rise of meritorious virtue, while all the time insisting that such virtues arise in only the most ancient or most aristocratic families’ (2005, 470). Moreover, when Edmund is restored to Lovel Castle and the hierarchic class structure is re-asserted, the lives of the female protagonists improve. At the end of the novel, Andrew is repentant and Margery can visit her adopted son again ($OEB$ 132). After Edmund’s noble birth is confirmed, Emma (the Baron Fitz-Owen’s daughter) no longer has to contemplate marrying a man she does not love. Along with his father, Lady Lovel (Edmund’s mother) is also afforded a proper burial ($OEB$ 127). Allied with an increasingly democratised aristocracy is a
benevolent patriarchy; women do not suffer when the status quo is restored. However, even though Walter ultimately fails to drag Edmund and the female protagonists back into the barbarous past, the crimes he commits remain concealed for decades and, without help from noble friends such as Harclay, they come close to remaining in suffering and obscurity. The aristocratic, elitist Whig greed and corruption of Walter comes close to destroying the progressive, liberating social order that is established at the end of *The Old English Baron* and is the real element of danger in this Gothic novel. Utilising Whig models of historiography, Reeve writes a fictional past to show not only what has been gained in the present, but what can so easily be lost. Such a message has an even greater resonance in the context of England’s recent defeat in America.

**HISTORICAL NIGHTMARES: RAPIN AND THE “GOTHIC” CONSTITUTION**

As my previous discussion of Rapin’s representation of the Magna Carta Barons highlights, a significant aspect of his history—and a major facet of Whig historiography—is an emphasis on ancient freedoms and the English constitution. In his *Dissertation*, Rapin contends that England has had a ‘mixt government’, with power shared between the King and Parliament, since the Anglo-Saxon conquest (1717, 2). This system continued until the seventeenth century, when James I attempted to roll back the power of Parliament. These political ideas reverberate in the *History of England*. Rapin may resist the traditional Whig view of Parliamentary powers by highlighting the late origins of the House of Commons, but, as Okie argues, he was really an ancient constitutionalist; his ‘entire work rests upon the proposition that English liberty could be traced back to the Saxon constitution’ (1991, 57). In the *History of England*, Rapin argues that the English constitution and English freedoms are at least as old as the Saxon constitution: ‘The maxim, that no laws are binding but what the whole nation has consented to, has all along been looked upon in England, as the foundation of liberty, and the basis of government’ (*H* 2: 176). It is the preservation of these ancient liberties that the Magna Carta Barons fight so hard to preserve against the tyrannical rule of John. For Rapin, the unwritten English constitution embodies unique, ancient English freedoms; liberties that need to be adhered to in all historical ages. According with many eighteenth-century debates on the subject, Rapin’s history conveys the notion of a “Gothic,” ancient constitution and perceives England as an inherently free nation. As an ancient constitutionalist, Rapin sees a unity and continuity behind the vicissitudes of history and the differences of constitutional forms. In highlighting the vulnerabilities and dangers to the constitution in diverse historical periods,
Rapin ‘makes no distinction between the fifteenth, sixteenth and eighteenth centuries’ (Forbes 1985, 240). Indeed, throughout the History of England, Rapin glorifies English polity and betrays fears surrounding the survival of the constitution and Gothic (ancient) freedoms. Rapin’s worst fear is the ever present threat of constitutional degeneration, as his following general remarks on Kings of England demonstrate:

The pride therefore and insatiable avarice of favourites and ministers are the only things that make him lose sometimes the advantages he may naturally draw from the constitution of the government. These men, impatient of seeing any bounds set to their unlawful ambition of governing with an absolute sway, seek all possible means to instill into their master a desire to set himself above the laws, and to become like other princes. That is, they do all that lies in their power to change the King’s true and solid happiness into real misery. For supposing a King of England should render himself absolute, he would never be able by oppression and violence to get from his people what he may draw from them with their consent, by submitting to the laws and constitution of the government. We have seen in the two late reigns of William III, and Queen Ann, and we daily see in that of the Prince now on the throne, such undeniable proofs of what I am saying, that I think it needless to add any thing farther (H 10: 230)

In the History of England, Rapin emphasises the perennial danger that the English constitution will be subverted by factionalism. The Whig historical narrative of liberty versus faction pervades every page and every historical period of Rapin’s history. Throughout his account, he highlights the frighteningly precarious nature of the constitution; comparable to a Gothic heroine, it is terrifyingly vulnerable and needs protecting by the friends of liberty and the enemies of faction. As my earlier discussion of the Magna Carta Barons revealed, justice needs to be vigorously defended and corrupt leaders (such as John) brought to account. The pride and avarice of courtiers continually threatens to divert reigning monarchs away from the liberating tenets of the treasured English constitution. Court influence threatens the corruption of Parliament, which has the potential to result in Rapin’s worst nightmare: the dissolution of Gothic (ancient and time-honoured) freedoms.

THE OLD ENGLISH BARON AND FEARS OF CONSTITUTIONAL DEGENERATION

Heightened by the traumatic cultural context of the American Revolution, the long held Whig anxieties that manifest themselves in Rapin’s History of England assumed a new resonance in the 1770s. The fears surrounding the constitution in Rapin’s historiography manifest themselves in Reeve’s Loyalist Gothic novel. Rapin’s history demonstrates that the perpetuation of the ancient, Gothic constitution is central to Whig historical and
political beliefs. As an Old Whig, Reeve believed in the Gothic, ancient origins of the constitution and perceived its survival as paramount to Britain’s future. H. T. Dickinson points out that, to Old Whigs and classical republicans such as Reeve and her father, the ‘constituion could only be safeguarded by men of property who cherished their independence and were prepared to put the public good before private gain’ (1977, 103). As Rapin’s History of England attests to, this constitution ‘could be tracked back to a Gothic and Anglo-Saxon past’, but it had been—and continued to be—threatened by a combination of increased royal power and patronage, large monied interests, and the growth of corruption as a means used to maintain the power of the crown and associated privileged interests (Dickinson 1977, 104). With the American Colonies highlighting problems with the nature of Britain’s constitutional monarchy and trying to drive a wedge between the monarchy and Parliament, the values of the constitution seemed more vulnerable than ever. As Dickinson points out, to Old Whigs and classical republicans such as Reeve and her father, the constitution could only be safeguarded by men of property who cherished their independence and were prepared to put the public good before private gain’ (1977, 103). As Rapin’s History of England attests to, this constitution ‘could be tracked back to a Gothic and Anglo-Saxon past’, but it had been—and continued to be—threatened by a combination of increased royal power and patronage, large monied interests, and the growth of corruption as a means used to maintain the power of the crown and associated privileged interests (Dickinson 1977, 104). With the American Colonies highlighting problems with the nature of Britain’s constitutional monarchy and trying to drive a wedge between the monarchy and Parliament, the values of the constitution seemed more vulnerable than ever.17

Old Whig fears of constitutional degeneration haunt the pages of The Old English Baron. Reeve exploits the Gothic’s focus on dysfunctional families as a vehicle to examine the wider threats facing Britain’s prosperity at a difficult historical moment. The Baron Fitz-Owen’s household is particularly significant. At the beginning of the novel, the Baron Fitz-Owen is ruler of Castle Lovel and, uninfluenced by his charges (Wenlock, Markham and Robert), rules as he sees fit. Recognising the innate nobility of Edmund, the Baron Fitz-Owen takes him into his care and, for a time, the newly created “family” all live peacefully under the same roof. The Baron Fitz-Owen enjoys ‘the true happiness of a parent’ (OEB 14), whilst Edmund is awed by the Baron’s goodness towards him and his ‘uncommon bounty’ (OEB 16). However, as Harclay predicts, Edward’s ‘good qualities’ begin to ‘excite envy and create him enemies’ (OEB 19). Indeed, the ‘sons and kinsmen’ begin to ‘find fault with him, and to depreciate him with others’ (OEB 19). As I alluded to earlier, Markham and Wenlock are particularly averse to Edmund’s ‘fine qualities’ (OEB 19). They manage to excite a ‘dislike in Master Robert’, which, in ‘time was fixed into habit, and fell little short of aversion’ (OEB 19). More significantly, however, they strive to ‘lessen him in the esteem of the Baron and his family’ (OEB 19). With Wenlock and Markham having ‘insinuated a thousand things against’ Edmund, the Baron Fitz-Owen ‘perceived that his kinsmen disliked Edmund’ (OEB 27). However, we learn that ‘his own good heart hindered him from seeing the baseness of theirs’ (OEB 27). ‘It is said’, writes Reeve, ‘that continual dropping will wear away a stone; so did their incessant reports, by insensible degrees, produce a coolness in his patron’s behaviour towards him’ (OEB 27).
The Old English Baron resonates with the Whig fears manifest in Rapin’s History of England; namely, the corruption of leaders (or monarchs) by insidious court cultures and anxieties surrounding the perversion of the English constitution. Comparable to the figure of a reigning monarch, the Baron Fitz-Owen is manipulated by his charges, who can be read as ambitious and deceitful courtiers. To use Rapin’s words, the ‘pride’ and ‘insatiable avarice of favourites’ make the Baron Fitz-Owen lose the ‘advantages he may naturally draw from the constitution of government’ (H 10: 230). Indeed, in The Old English Baron, Rapin’s Whig historical nightmares are very nearly realised. We learn that if Edmund ‘behaved with manly spirit, it was misconstrued into pride and arrogance; his generosity was imprudence; his humility was hypocrisy, the better to cover his ambition’ (OEB 27). Alienated in the Baron Fitz-Owen’s favour by jealous enemies, Edmund is compelled to flee the Castle Lovel; in order to regain his credibility, he has to prove his own ancestry and show the Baron Fitz-Owen how he has been misled by his jealous, scheming charges. Ambition and greed threaten to overturn the spirit of liberty that has governed Lovel Castle for so many years. The founding tenets of the English constitution—liberty and the rule of law—become warped and corrupt. Edmund comes perilously close to spending his life wronged and in total obscurity. In perhaps the most striking parallel with Rapin’s history, the Baron Fitz-Owen highlights the very real threat of constitutional degeneration and the frightening vulnerability of its liberating tenets: ‘It is no wonder that princes should be so frequently deceived, when I, a private man, could be so much imposed upon within the circle of my own family’ (OEB 84). Using the Baron Fitz-Owen’s ‘family’ as a means of commenting on the state of Britain towards the end of the eighteenth century, Reeve (similarly to Rapin) highlights the fragility of law and order.

Indeed, justice is a particularly prominent feature of the past constructed in The Old English Baron. Writing in a period where the colonised (the Thirteen Colonies) had recently revolted against the colonisers (England), contemporary fears surrounding law and order manifest themselves throughout Reeve’s fictional fifteenth-century past. Since its inception, the Gothic has been fixated with the law and transgressions of established social customs. Focusing on the machinations of Manfred and the usurpation of Theodore’s estate, Walpole’s Otranto raises issues concerning government and succession. Reeve exploits the Gothic’s focus on the law and, by doing so, the past she writes in The Old English Baron refracts contemporary concerns surrounding the survival of Gothic (time-honoured) English liberties. This brings me back to the Baron Fitz-Owen’s manipulation by his charges and his unfair (and unconstitutional) treatment of Edmund during this time.
Blind to the schemes of Wenlock and Markham, the Baron Fitz-Owen judges Edmund and changes his behaviour towards him. He accuses him of speaking ill of him and sentences him to spend a night in an abandoned wing of the castle (*OEB* 33). Indeed, in *The Old English Baron*, one of the most cherished maxims of the English constitution—the presumption that a person is considered innocent until proven guilty—is very nearly subverted. As Robert Miles points out, since its genesis, the Gothic has functioned as a form that draws attention to the ‘law’s fragility’ (2001, 62).

This is certainly the case in Reeve’s Loyalist Gothic novel where the law—and, by implication, the English constitution—is constantly tested and under threat. Having lost the duel with Harclay and confessed to usurping Edmund’s fortune, Walter is given the very generous offer of either retiring ‘into a religious house’ or else quitting ‘the kingdom in three months time’ (*OEB* 107). He is also offered a ‘decent annuity, that he may not want the comforts of life’ (*OEB* 107). Throughout this entire episode, there is a strong emphasis on legal proceedings; Lord Clifford is appointed ‘arbitrator’ for Edmund’s claim and keeps records of events as they unfold (*OEB* 80). Despite such rigorous legal proceedings, Walter comes very close to transgressing the law and affecting an escape (*OEB* 118). Without the watchful eye of Zadisky (a servant loyal to Sir Philip Harclay), Walter may well have defied the law and left Edmund in obscurity. The rightful line of succession for the governance of Lovel Castle comes frighteningly close to being subverted forever. In line with Whig historical divisions, those who uphold the law and, thus, promote the most cherished values of the constitution, are celebrated whilst those who transgress it are villainised.

Shaped by the Whig mode of historical writing, a founding, progressive element of the English constitution and a social mechanism treasured in the present—the law—is a subject of intense scrutiny in the fifteenth-century past of Reeve’s Gothic novel. There is a particular emphasis on juridical proceedings. Throughout the episode where Walter admits to murdering Edmund’s brother, Lord Clifford and Lord Graham—the appointed ‘Commissioners’ for the case—make sure that they are ‘entirely satisfied with the justice of Edmund’s pretensions’ and keep ‘an account in writing of all that they had been eye-witness to’ (*OEB* 121). Despite Walter’s testimony and, indeed, his own, Edmund is still compelled to present evidence of his true ancestry: ‘I can see nothing to make us doubt the truth of it: But let us examine the proofs. Edmund gave into their hands the necklace and ear-rings’ (*OEB* 106). Once Walter’s escape has been foiled and Edmund’s ancestry is finally confirmed, attention quickly switches to financial settlements: ‘Who is to pay the
arrears of my ward’s estate, which he had unjustly been kept out of these one and twenty years?”, questions Harclay (OEB 108). For all the emphasis on a ‘democratising sensibility’ (Chaplin 2007, 78) in this Gothic novel, strict legal procedures and customs ultimately settle disputes concerning property and ancestry. As Chaplin points out, law enforcement and ‘financial settlements remain central to the restoration of social, legal and moral norms at the end of the text’ (2007, 78). Echoing Whig historical writing, the past and present become difficult to demarcate; the lengthy legal and financial dispute that takes place in the fifteenth century is more reminiscent of contemporary, eighteenth-century procedures. With notions of English national identity shaken by recent events at home and abroad, Reeve’s fictional past reveals not only anxieties concerning the force of the law and its perpetuation, but the importance of judicial processes to the nation’s stability. In order to maintain the law and fend off threats of constitutional degeneration, ancient Gothic customs do not only need to be practiced in times of crisis; they need to be vigorously defended.

‘GOTHIC TIMES AND MANNERS’: REEVE, RAPIN AND MILITARY HISTORY
This brings me back to Rapin’s *History of England*. Even though he was a professional soldier by trade, Rapin’s historical work is uninterested in martial conflicts. Anticipating Hume’s Enlightenment aversion to violence in history, Rapin argues that the historian should only record ‘the causes and grounds… the interests, motives and artifices of the parties’ involved in battles rather than focusing on ‘warlike exploits’ (*H* 12: 55). Speaking of sieges during the reign of Henry VI, he argues that to relate the particulars of such violent events would lead one into a ‘thousand circumstances which few people would think worth notice’; the best method, continues Rapin, is to ‘only mark in two words the beginnings and issues’ of such conflicts (*H* 5: 227). *The Old English Baron* can be read as an imaginative response to the suppression of fighting and heroic martial deeds in Rapin’s history. However, in comparison to Walpole, Reeve exploits the Gothic’s concern with violence and conflict for very different ends. Focusing on Gothic savageness and backwardness, Walpole’s *Otranto* exhibits numerous violent events and conflicts as a means of revolting against the suppression of such occurrences in Hume’s historiography. Exploiting the term “Gothic” to denote old-fashioned and ancient values, Reeve takes the Gothic’s preoccupation with conflict and violence and uses it to bolster Britain’s glorious, military past at a time when the country’s martial might and time-honoured liberties were severely challenged.
In the introduction to *The Old English Baron*, Reeve speaks of her novel as ‘being a picture of Gothic times and manners’ (*OEB* 2). Indeed, she constructs a medieval past that stages the hostile defence of ancient, Gothic freedoms and where martial endeavours and chivalry feature prominently. Perhaps the most notable example of this is Harclay’s duel with Walter. The duel conforms to very strict social customs: Lord Clifford and Lord Graham are installed as judges of the field, Harclay declares the ‘cause of his quarrel’, Walter is required to answer the charges levelled against him, both combatants are presented with their weapons and are then allowed to fight (*OEB* 86–87). Sweating with the ‘violence of the exercise’, Harclay sets out to ‘wound but not kill Walter’ (*OEB* 88). He thrusts his ‘sword through his left arm’ and then ‘passed the sword through his body twice’ (*OEB* 88). With Walter ‘slain’, Harclay removes the villain’s weapon and demands an ‘honest confession’ (*OEB* 88). After some resistance, Walter obliges, thus ensuring the restoration of Edmund as master of the Castle Lovel. Walpole’s Gothic novel focuses on superstition and Catholicism; Reeve’s Loyalist Gothic work cultivates Protestant images of glory, heroism and chivalry. As Richard Hurd argues in his influential *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762), chivalry is a ‘military institution’ (7); ‘PROWESS, GENEROSITY, GALLANTRY, and RELIGION’, he argues, are the ‘peculiar and vaunted characteristics of the purer ages of chivalry’ (14). Harclay’s chivalric actions serve to reaffirm the importance of custom, hierarchy and rank. The historical accuracy of the duel is of little importance to Reeve. Conforming to Maurice Keen’s theory of chivalry, she holds up an idealised historical image of armed conflict in defiance of the harsh realities of actual warfare (1984, 237). Individual heroism comes over strongly with sword fighting, as combat is at close quarters. In an age where political corruption is rife and the nation’s future uncertain, Reeve looks back to a purer (albeit fictional) past in order to rouse patriotism in the troubled present.

In *The Old English Baron*, threats of constitutional degeneration are dispelled by a forceful adherence to time honoured social customs and a commitment to law enforcement. By the end of the novel, Walter is brought to justice, Edmund (deservedly) regains his estate and all the main protagonists (including Harclay and the Baron Fitz-Owen) go on to live long and happy lives. Throughout Reeve’s Gothic novel, Harclay is an exemplary patriot; he always acts in the interest of the constitution, upholds its values and enforces justice. Communicating more to Reeve’s own generation than the medieval past of which she writes, Harclay is a champion of virtue; he is a model of how to act in times of national and constitutional crisis. ‘When we read of our glorious ancestors’, writes Reeve in
Memoirs of Sir Roger de Clarendon, ‘their actions ought to stimulate us to equal them, to support and maintain the honour of our country: to be ashamed to degenerate from our forefathers, to sit down in indolence and effeminacy, and bring reproach upon them’ (Reeve 1793, xii). In Harclay, Reeve presents a defender of the realm and a figure worthy of imitation in the present; remembrance of him is designed to encourage future generations to ‘emulate his virtues’ and ‘be ashamed to degenerate from their ancestor’ (OEB 135). Against the threat of hostile enemies, Harclay forcefully defends the innocent and fights for liberty. Influenced by Whig history, Reeve presents a fifteenth-century past where treasured English freedoms are constantly under threat but are ultimately defended and perpetuated. Reeve cultivates a cohesive sense of English national identity by exhibiting ancestral heroes and the purity of the Gothic, Saxon democratic tradition.

The historical setting of Reeve’s novel is telling in this respect. Indeed, she chooses to set The Old English Baron in ‘the minority of Henry the Sixth, King of England, when the renowned John Duke of Bedford was a Regent of France, and Humphrey the good Duke of Gloucester was Protector of England’ (OEB 5). Published after Otranto and bearing the words, ‘A Gothic Story’ (OEB 5) on its title page, this would not seem the most obvious place to set a suspenseful novel. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Walpole constructs a strange, vague and medieval history in order to reveal the unfamiliarity of the past and to heighten superstitious fears. Although Reeve is not overly concerned with historical accuracy and her novel is more fiction than fact, she opts for quite a precise historical period where real historical figures are in evidence, albeit marginally. Rapin’s History of England is useful for understanding Reeve’s choice of historical setting. Indeed, she sets her novel at a very specific historical moment; after the hugely successful reign of Henry V and in the very early reign of Henry VI, when Humphrey the Duke of Gloucester was protector of the realm between 1422 and 1437. Rapin’s history is particularly notable for its focus on Britain’s colonial relationship with France. As Rapin’s history records, this was a turbulent time, but a generally successful one (H 5: 207–16). Due to aggressive foreign policy, England secured a ‘long-awaited hiatus in the civil wars as well as an absolute sovereignty over a sizeable portion of France’ (Coykendall 2005, 452). Indeed, the action of The Old English Baron is set on something of a historical cusp; it is set in a time of martial success, in the afterglow of Henry V’s valorous deeds and just before the disastrous rule of Henry VI (he takes to the throne in 1437). Proliferating with instances of usurpation, treachery, scheming, manipulation, ancestral conflicts and domestic tensions, Rapin’s history highlights how Henry’s later
reign becomes a series of disastrous events and instances of poor government with the monarchy becoming increasingly unpopular due to a breakdown of law and order, corruption, court favouritism and the steady loss of territories to France \( (H 5: 449–50) \). Rapin argues that Henry comes to be ‘looked upon only as the shadow of a king’ and as ‘incapable of retrieving the honour of the nation, and restoring the affairs of the kingdom to a flourishing state’ \( (H 5: 409) \).

In *The Old English Baron*, Reeve’s fifteenth-century past functions as an analogue for her own age. Offering a historical parallel to the glorious, expansionist reign of Henry V before the later disastrous, contracting rule of Henry VI, Britain had recently defeated France in the Seven Years War (1756–63) and consolidated an American empire. However, echoing the loss of territories in Henry VI’s reign, Britain seemed about to lose all this in a ‘widely unpopular war, imposed by royal will, against the American colonies, which were allied to the old enemy, France’ (Kelly 2002, 1: lxviii). Political division at home, doubts about the effectiveness of a constitutional monarchy and concerns about the growth of royal power raised doubts about the progress of civil society and Britain’s future as a world power. As Toni Wein writes, in *The Old English Baron*, the reader is ‘invited into a space that is simultaneously the distant past and the immediate present’ (2002, 7). At the time in which Reeve is writing, Britain seems alarmingly close to following the nationally destructive times of Henry VI’s reign, where division and unconstitutional behaviour have a corrosive effect on the nation’s prosperity and expansion. Countering the suppression of martial conflict in Rapin’s *History of England*, Reeve adapts the Gothic for a patriotic agenda, re-affirming Gothic, ancient values and rousing memories of Britain’s glorious military past. In a deeply troubled present, Reeve calls for the preservation of ancient and unique English liberties.

**THE OLD ENGLISH BARON AND THE NATURE OF THE PAST**

Reeve appeals to a Gothic (ancient, chivalrous) past in order to provide models of good, imitable behaviour in the present. The manner in which she represents the past in *The Old English Baron* tells us much about her attitude towards history. Akin to *Otranto*, Reeve’s Gothic novel is presented as a discovered manuscript. Although Reeve dropped this device in the second edition (as Walpole did), when she first published her work as *The Champion of Virtue* in 1777, her ‘address to the reader’ describes the text’s origin. ‘[I]t occurred to my remembrance’, writes Reeve, ‘that a certain friend of mine was in possession of a manuscript in the old English language’ \( (OEB 139) \). If ‘it were to be modernised’, she
exclams, it ‘might afford entertainment’ (OEB 139). Assuming the role of an editor, Reeve describes how, with her ‘friend’s permission’, she ‘transcribed, or rather translated a few sheets’ of the script (OEB 139). Having read it to a ‘circle of friends of approved judgement’ who gave her the ‘warmest encouragement to proceed’, she is compelled to ‘finish it’ (OEB 139). Furthermore, Reeve uses the Gothic trope of the discovered manuscript not only as a framing device, but as a theme throughout her novel. Even though she chose to drop this frame in the second edition, the novel still has the appearance of a manuscript. For example, a short way into the narrative, Reeve (retaining the role of editor) interdicts: ‘From this place the characters in the manuscript are effaced by time and damp. Here and there some sentences are legible, but not sufficient to pursue the thread of the story’ (OEB 23). ‘The following incidents are clear enough to be transcribed’, continues Reeve, before describing how ‘the beginning of the next succeeding pages is obliterated’ (OEB 23). She suggests that ‘we may guess at the beginning by what remains’ and then uses a series of asterisks to denote an absence in the script (OEB 23). Indeed, Reeve innovates the Gothic trope of the discovered manuscript by introducing the notion of historical mutability; the early parts of the script are replete with missing sections, signs of decay and absences; dimensions of the past that Rapin’s (and Hume’s) history generally disregards. A little further on, Reeve declares that the ‘manuscript is not legible for several pages’, particularly surrounding the time of ‘the death of Lady Fitz-Owen’ (OEB 26). The text resumes for a short paragraph before she tells us that the ‘manuscript is again defaced for many leaves’ (OEB 26). Reeve highlights the fragile nature of the past and our convoluted access to it in the present.

Building on Walpole’s Otranto, Reeve adds a narrative complexity to the Gothic and its representations of the past. She invests the Gothic trope of the discovered manuscript with historical chasms and lapses in time: ‘Here follows an interval of four years, as by the manuscript and this omission seems intended by the Writer’ (OEB 19). Indeed, The Old English Baron is deceptive; when scrutinised and considered alongside the preface to the first edition (where Reeve assumes the role of editor), its structure is far more complicated than it initially appears. Not only do years elapse in the writing of the manuscript (or so Reeve would have us believe), but it shows evidence of multiple authorship: ‘What follows is in a different hand, and the character is more modern’ (OEB 19). Rewriting Otranto, Reeve develops the Gothic’s emphasis on the textual nature of history, our troubled access to it in the present and the complexity of historical transmission; aspects of the past that Hume’s and Rapin’s (proto)Enlightenment
historiography belies. The representation of the past in *The Old English Baron* is further complicated by discussions surrounding the recording of historical events in the narrative and the external structure of the novel is sophisticated by its internal discussion. For example, after Walter’s crime is revealed and Edmund takes over as rightful master of the Castle Lovel, Lord Graham’s priest suggests ‘that an account be written of this discovery, and signed by all the witnesses present’ (*OEB* 116). Furthermore, he requests that ‘an attested copy be left in the hands of this gentleman, and the original be sent to the Barons and Harclay, to convince them of the truth of it’ (*OEB* 116). It is not until the end of the novel, where Harclay ‘caused the papers relating to his son’s [Edmund’s] history to be collected together’, that we are informed that the ‘first part’ of the script was ‘written under his [Harclay’s] own eye in Yorkshire’ and that ‘the subsequent parts by Father Oswald at the Castle of Lovel’ (*OEB* 135). However, as Fiona Robertson points out, although Reeve may highlight the incomplete and disjointed nature of history, the written version of the past in *The Old English Baron* ‘provides all the information the reader needs’ (1994, 89).

Indeed, it is important to note that the manuscript is only fragmented in the early parts of the narrative. After a certain point, ‘*the letters become more legible, and the remainder of it is quite perfect*’ (*OEB* 26). True to her word, there are no more breaks in the text for the remainder of the narrative. Although Reeve does use the Gothic trope of the discovered manuscript to highlight the truncated and fragile nature of history and to heighten anxiety and suspense, she does not do so to the extent that Walpole does (or any of the other authors discussed in this thesis do). The past is still a site of conflict and anxiety for Reeve, but she focuses predominantly on the *familiarity* of the past rather than on our alien, disembodied relationship with history. Watt phrases this quite elegantly when he argues that Reeve’s Loyalist Gothic story and the past which it recounts emphasises ‘familiarity rather than a distant alterity’ (2003, xix). As this chapter has highlighted, Reeve dwells less on the nature of the past and more on the relevance of the past to the present and the didactic role of history. Indeed, in many ways, the structure of Reeve’s historic Gothic novel resembles the English constitution; it is a disparate collection of documents written by multiple authors and consisting of various legal decisions and conventions. Similarly to Rapin’s Whig conception of the English constitution, a spirit of justice and liberty suffuses every fragment and page of *The Old English Baron*. For Reeve, the fragmented nature of history only means that it is more important than ever to preserve ancient customs by adhering to them in the present. The complex textual tissue and multiple authorship of Reeve’s work serves to underscore the unanimity of benevolent
patriarchs and their commitment to fending off transgressors and preserving ancient liberties. The ultimate fear in The Old English Baron is that such fragile, Gothic liberties may not be transmitted to future generations because of internal and external threats to time-honoured, treasured social ideals. Even though the fifteenth-century past of Reeve’s novel is precarious, fragile and wrought with its own perils, Reeve is generally comforted by it; it offers a valuable (not to mention timely) lesson for the present by exhibiting the valiant defence of embattled freedoms and rouses patriotic pride in Britain’s glorious past.

CONCLUSION: THE GOTHIC AUTHORESS AND HISTORY
As this chapter has demonstrated, The Old English Baron represents a very different direction for the Gothic in the eighteenth century. In Reeve’s novel, the Gothic continues to react to (proto)Enlightenment modes of historical writing. Assessed alongside Rapin’s History of England, The Old English Baron exhibits the Gothic both rejecting and assimilating elements of dominant modes of eighteenth-century history. Reeve gives the past a much firmer moral purpose than Rapin, but is also heavily influenced by his Whig codes of historical representation and the political themes that form an integral part of this.

The relationship between literature, the Gothic and history becomes increasingly complicated in The Old English Baron. Rather than following the dictates of Otranto by constructing a narrative that focuses exclusively on gruesome histories, acts of treachery and supernatural occurrences, Reeve writes a more congenial past; one which, although it features disturbing moments, provides models of good personal and political conduct. As an early example of the Loyalist Gothic—a form that would not reach its peak until the French Revolution turned violent in the 1790s—Reeve utilises the Gothic to cultivate patriotism in a period where Britain’s future was cast into question by the revolt of the American Colonies.

The Old English Baron has traditionally been neglected on the grounds that it presents something of an awkward fit in the genesis of a normative, homogeneous Gothic genre. However, as this chapter (and this thesis) demonstrates, the Gothic is a site of conflict and contested ideologies. A study of Gothic representations of the past would simply be incomplete without discussing Reeve’s contribution; as I will show, so much of what follows is a reaction to The Old English Baron. For a Gothic novel written by a woman in the eighteenth century, it is perhaps surprising that women and the politics of female identity do not play a larger part in the narrative. Reeve’s novel does focus on masculine behaviour and inculcate a code of manliness: benevolent, courageous and
respectful towards women, Edmund and Harclay are historical figures that Reeve presents as role models for men in the eighteenth century. However, as this chapter has suggested, women have a rather marginal role in the narrative and there is little emphasis on female subjectivity. If the “Female Gothic” is defined as a form of fiction that focuses on the heroine and the house, *The Old English Baron* cannot be classified as an example (or even an early prototype) of such a work. Nevertheless, the fact that the novel engages with history and is clearly penned by a politically motivated authoress is significant. In the eighteenth century, women were encouraged to read history as an antidote to “poisonous” novels, but they were not granted the privilege or, in many cases, the education, to write history. Catharine Macaulay did write a fully-fledged history that received considerable acclaim. However, behind the praise there was concern that a woman had transgressed into the male-dominated world of historiography. As Kelly notes, because of the hybridity and generic openness of the Gothic novel, it ‘could be used to appropriate and diffuse all kinds of discourses otherwise barred to women or difficult for them to engage in openly and directly’ (2002, 1: xxix). As *The Old English Baron* demonstrates, the Gothic provides the perfect vehicle for women writers to access and have their say on prestigious, male-dominated subjects such as politics and history; subjects otherwise denied to them.

Rewriting Walpole’s *Otranto*, the fictional, politicised past of Reeve’s novel showed future female writers the possibilities that the Gothic could afford. In a more striking way than Walpole’s *Otranto*, *The Old English Baron* showed how fictional pasts can be used as a means of commenting on the present. Whereas Reeve appealed to an ancient, Gothic history of benevolent patriarchs in order to cultivate a sense of united national identity during a time of national anxiety, writers such as Sophia Lee and Ann Radcliffe would write pasts that engage explicitly with eighteenth-century gender politics. As this thesis will demonstrate, the “Gothic” continued to be a fiercely contested term in the eighteenth century. The ways in which authors interpreted the term shaped the pasts they wrote. In Lee’s *The Recess*—the next Gothic novel to be published after *The Old English Baron*—Reeve’s emphasis on recorded history and actual historical periods would remain important. Countering Reeve’s virtuous fifteenth-century past peopled by benevolent patriarchs, Lee constructs a complex sixteenth-century past characterised by fear and oppression. The absences and gaps that characterise the Gothic trope of the discovered manuscript (and that did not particularly trouble Reeve) would become very significant for Lee. Changing the direction of the Gothic once more, Lee focuses more on gender politics than on party politics. Morbid and tragic female histories remain on the
periphery of Reeve’s novel; in Lee’s *The Recess*, such repressed and macabre female pasts loom much larger in the Gothic imagination.

Notes

1. A notable Gothic work to be published in the interim between *Otranto* and *The Old English Baron* was John Aikin’s *Sir Bertrand, a Fragment* (1773). This “Fragment” is often wrongfully ascribed to his more famous sister, Anna Laetitia Aikin (later Mrs Barbauld), due to the fact that it was published in their joint collection of *Miscellaneous Pieces* (1773). The work is a literary realisation of the principles outlined in his sister’s prefatory essay, ‘On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror’ (1773). Walpole approved highly of the fragment; he argued that its author ‘showed her talent for imprinting terror’ (1937–83, 41: 410). Many of the images contained in the *Fragment* found their way into later Gothic works. These include doors creaking on hinges, seemingly endless stairways, vaunted halls in ancient mansions, the touch of a cold dead hand, deep hollow groans, a mysterious light and the protagonist’s sensation of terror. As I will show in the next two chapters, the figure of the fragment itself became very important for future Gothic writers and their representations of the past.

2. In his brief memoir of Reeve that he contributed to the Novelist’s Library Edition of her work, Sir Walter Scott argues that, despite a ‘competent command of those qualities which constitute a good romance’ (1829, 243), *The Old English Baron* is ‘tame and tedious, not to say mean and tiresome’ (248). Furthermore, he describes Reeve as a secluded ‘authoress’, whose ‘acquaintance of events and characters derived from books alone’ (248). Scott also acknowledges that Reeve was acquainted with Rapin’s historical work (246).

3. In the last decade, a number of extended studies of *The Old English Baron* have been published. Notable examples of books that dedicate chapters to Reeve’s Gothic novel include Toni Wein’s *British Identities* (2002), Donna Heiland’s *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction* (2004) and Sue Chaplin’s *The Gothic and the Rule of Law 1764–1820* (2007). Volume 1 of Kelly’s *Varieties of Female Gothic* (2002) and Abby Coykendall’s essay, ‘Gothic Genealogies, the Family Romance, and Clara Reeve’s *The Old English Baron*’ (2005) also discuss Reeve’s Gothic novel at length.

4. See my Afterword and Watt’s *Contesting the Gothic* for further discussion of 1790s Loyalist Gothic works (1999, 42–69).

5. Toni Wein also examines the impact of the American Revolution on *The Old English Baron* in *British Identities* (2002). Focusing on the family as a cipher for the nation and arguing that the private comments on the public, Wein contends that Reeve’s Gothic novel ‘thematizes the American Revolution and its aftermath, first by telling multilayered stories of betrayal, and then by accommodating individual and social rights’ (2002, 74–76).

6. Throughout the forthcoming discussion the terms “Gothic” and “Loyalist Gothic” will be used interchangeably. The term Gothic will be used to denote aspects that are common to the genre; it will often be used in the context of discussing how Reeve adapts the conventions set out by Walpole in *Otranto*. The term Loyalist Gothic will be used to highlight how Reeve’s novel—a prototype of this strain of fiction—differentiates itself from other Gothic works (primarily *Otranto*). When discussing contested political definitions of the “Gothic,” such distinctions will be made clear in the relevant sections.
Wilkes was a patriot, heralded a strictly Whig interpretation of English history and celebrated Whig ancient constitutionalism. As this chapter discusses, Reeve held similar beliefs and such notions can be detected in the fictional fifteenth-century past that Reeve represents in *The Old English Baron*, which attempts to cultivate a strong sense of national purpose in a challenging cultural context.

8. It is widely acknowledged that Rapin’s historiography had a large influence on Hume. For example, Laird Okie points out that the ‘influence of Rapin can be detected in David Hume’s analysis of the rise of political parties and in his picture of the ““moderate men” from both parties ejecting James II’ (1991, 56). The anti-clericalism of Rapin’s account also appealed to Hume. However, he rejected the Whig bias of Rapin’s account and contested his notion of an ancient, “Gothic” constitution (see note below).

9. In the same letter, she also reveals that she had ‘read Cato’s Letters, by Trenchard and Gordon... the Greek and Roman Histories, and Plutarch’s Lives’ (Reeve 1829). As critics such as Kelly have noted (2003, 117), by showing how history can be used to teach civic virtue and social responsibility, Plutarch’s historically-inflected work had a particularly significant influence on Reeve.

10. The novels of Samuel Richardson had a large impact on Reeve’s fiction. In her history of prose fiction, *The Progress of Romance* (1785), Reeve heaps praise on Richardson, and especially *Pamela* (1740–41). She was particularly influenced by his appropriation of fiction for didactic ends and Richardsonian themes (such as virtue in distress and the certainty of retribution) manifest themselves throughout her fiction. E. J. Clery goes as far as to describe *The Old English Baron* as Reeve’s ‘rewriting of *Otranto* as *Pamela* in fancy-dress with the spice of the paranormal, an illustrative conduct-book for the proper correlation of wealth and virtue’ (1995, 86). Furthermore, in a telling gesture, Reeve prefaced the 1780 edition of her Gothic work with a dedication to Martha Bridgen, daughter of Richardson. She acknowledges the influence of her ‘patronage and protection’ and credits her with correcting ‘the errors of the first impression’ (*OEB* 140). For more information on the textual variants of *The Old English Baron*, see Watt’s notes (*OEB* xxv–xxvii).

11. *The Old English Baron*’s relationship with sensibility is complex. As I mentioned previously, the situation of the story—that of virtue in distress—is clearly influenced by novels of sensibility (primarily Richardson’s). Numerous critics have discussed this aspect of Reeve’s work. Watt highlights how, rather than functioning as a fifteenth-century character, Edmund is shown to be ‘possessed of a modern, eighteenth-century sensibility’ and bonds with others ‘in an expressive, sentimental fashion, in such a way as to temper differences of rank’ (2003, xvi). Sue Chaplin notes that the virtuous characters in *The Old English Baron* are not only imbued with a greater range of emotions; their actions present an ‘alternative economy of justice that is dependent on the promptings of the heart’, which ‘supplements legally proper claims to property and power’ (2007, 77). However, as she notes, social class is still rigidly asserted at the end of the novel. I will examine this in more detail when I discuss the role of the law in Reeve’s fictional fifteenth-century past. For a thorough discussion of the role of sensibility in *The Old English Baron* (and particularly its relationship with social rank) see Chaplin’s *The Gothic and the Rule of Law, 1764–1820* (2007, 76–82). Reeve would express fears concerning sensibility, and what she refers to as ‘false sensibility’ (1791, viii), in her later novel, *The School for Widows* (1791). I discuss the relationship between Lee’s *The Recess*, the Gothic and sensibility in the following chapter.

13. Rapin’s critics were quick to react to the clear Whig slant of his *History of England*. In 1734, the *Defence of English History Against the Misrepresentations of M. de Rapin-Thoyras* (1734) was published. This work criticised the *History of England* as anti-monarchical, anti-church, and accused Rapin of promoting levelling and anarchism.

14. Reeve’s politics informed her works from the outset. In 1772, she published her first work of fiction, *The Phoenix; or The History of Polyarchus and Argenis*. This work translates and adapts John Barclay’s Latin *Argenis* (1621), a political allegory on France’s religious and civil wars of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Attracted to the work because of its relevance to her own age, Reeve describes *The Phoenix* as ‘a romance, an allegory, and a system of politics’ (1772, 1: i). Indeed, it is this political and didactic dimension of Reeve’s fiction that has led Gary Kelly to discuss Reeve as a Bluestocking writer. Although there is little evidence to suggest that Reeve was in contact with the metropolitan Bluestocking Circle, he argues that Reeve can be perceived as a ‘provincial Bluestocking’ (2003, 105). Citing her Old Whig values, Kelly argues that her fiction shares a Bluestocking agenda in the sense that it is interested in ‘modernisation in state, economy, society and culture’ and alliances ‘between progressive gentry and professional people’ in order to increase ‘prosperity in an economy still largely agrarian’ and dominated by ‘gentry wealth, status, and power’ (1999, 1: xlv). For Kelly, Reeve’s didactic fiction—and particularly her later works—aim ‘to secure a more prominent role within modernisation for women of the classes whose interests modernisation served’ (xlv). However, Kelly’s study focuses almost exclusively on the social utility of *The Old English Baron* and limits discussion of her use of Gothic tropes and the fears that are manifest in her novel. This chapter seeks to cultivate an image of Reeve as a Gothic authoress. For more information on Reeve’s status as a writer with Bluestocking affinities, see Kelly’s *Bluestocking Feminism* (1999) and his essay, ‘Clara Reeve, Provincial Bluestocking: From the Old Whigs to the Modern Liberal State’ (2003).

15. Perhaps the most influential discussion of the relationship between Whig history and Gothic fiction is conducted by Robert Mighall in the first chapter of his *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction* (1999, 1–26). Concentrating on Radcliffe’s Gothic fiction, Mighall discusses the Whig notion of the past as a site of conflict and identifies the struggles that take place between those representing modernity and those fighting for the tyranny of the past. He also focuses on the Whig associations of Protestantism with progressivism and Catholicism with backwardness. With his attention directed more towards Victorian Gothic fiction, Mighall does not discuss Reeve or the possible impact of Whig history on the past represented in *The Old English Baron*. 
16. Hume objected to the Whig political slant of the *History of England*. He criticised both the style and content of Rapin’s history and waged war against Whig orthodoxy by radically revising theories of ancient constitutionalism. Challenging notions of a constitution that has remained essentially the same throughout diverse historical periods, Hume argues that the ‘English constitution, like all others, has been in a state of continual fluctuation’ (*HE* 4: 355). Hume sets about destroying what he perceives as the Whig myth of the ancient constitution. As Forbes points out (1985: 267), for Hume, the ‘more ancient the constitution, the more primitive and barbaric and unworthy of imitation it is’. Indeed, it was the less political and more philosophical and literary bent of Hume’s *The History of England* that appealed to the later Georgian readership and that helped it to supersede Rapin’s history.

17. Although discussions concerning the origins and future of the English constitution came into sharper focus with the outbreak of the American Revolution and, later, the French Revolution, such debates raged throughout the eighteenth century. Two notable contributions to such debates are Charles Louis de Secondat de Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws* (composed in 1748 and translated into English in 1750) and William Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765–69). Both of these writers argue that the English constitution has ancient, Gothic, Germanic roots. Blackstone’s study is particularly interesting in terms of eighteenth-century Gothic literature in the sense that he famously likens the English constitution to a Gothic castle which needs only a few minor modifications to make it relevant and efficient within a modern context. For a detailed study of the implications of Blackstone’s work on early Gothic literature, see Sue Chaplin’s *The Gothic and the Rule of Law, 1764–1820* (2007, 39–47).

18. These words are actually spoken about the Baron Fitz-Owen. However, as early critics demonstrate, the identity of the title character of Reeve’s novel provokes debate. When she decides to revise her novel, Reeve argues that she changes the ‘title from the *Champion of Virtue* to the *Old English Baron*:— as that character is thought to be the principal one in the story’ (*OEB* 4). As Scott notes, however, the Baron Fitz-Owen is quite a marginal and ‘passive’ figure in the narrative and is ‘only acted upon by others’ (1829, 242). Anna Laetitia Barbauld argues that Harclay is ‘a fine character’ and that he is the ‘old baron’ of the title (1810, ii).

19. Discussing the historical specificity of *The Old English Baron*, Angela Wright points out that Reeve ‘inserts the real historical figure of Richard of Plantagenet’ (2003, 99). Reeve describes him as a man ‘whose pride of birth equalled that of any man living or dead’ (*OEB* 25). This mixing of real historical figures with fictional characters represents an important moment for Gothic fiction and would prove significant for Lee’s *The Recess* (see next chapter).

20. Embarking on the remarkable task of writing an eight volume historical work, Catharine Macaulay’s *History of England* was published between 1763 and 1783. It was initially received positively, especially by Whigs, who identified it as an antidote to Hume’s Tory-biased *The History of England*. However, the *Monthly Review* focused more on the fact that a woman had written such a work than on the merits of Macaulay’s history. Indeed, the *Review*’s tone is quite condescending, referring to her as ‘the fair Macaulay’ (*Monthly Review* 1763, 372) and ‘our fair historian’ (374). Although the *Review* offers mild praise for her work, it expresses a wish that ‘the same degree of genius and application had been exerted in more
suitable pursuits’, because writing history is not recommended ‘to the practice of our lovely countrywomen’ (372–73). Macaulay’s sympathy with the American colonists also diminished her in the eyes of many Whigs.

21. Reeve’s fascination with history remained undimmed throughout her writing career. In the preface to her semi-historical Memoirs of Sir Roger de Clarendon (1793), she speaks of having attempted to write a history of all the great men who lived in the reign of Edward III. However, having filled several sheets of paper with names, she realised the task was beyond her powers (1793, xvi). She elects instead to write the aforementioned novel; a work which uses the past to urge Britain to adhere to a strict subordination of ranks in the wake of Revolutionary events taking place in France. Reeve’s last known work was a fictionalised history entitled Edwin, King of Northumberland: A Story of the Seventh Century (1802). Written for young readers, it pursues the Plutarchan agenda of using the lives of great men of history to educate youths in civic virtues.

22. The Old English Baron was not supposed to be Reeve’s last foray into Gothic fiction. In the preface to her novel, The Exiles (1788), she speaks of writing a ‘Ghost Story’ (1788, xviii) entitled ‘Castle Connor—an Irish Story’ (xix). Reeve completed the work in 1786 and sent it to London by the Ipswich blue coach in May 1787, but it was lost in transit. There is speculation that the story is contained in Fatherless Fanny, a novel attributed to Reeve and published in 1819. However, Reeve believed the tale was stolen and it is unlikely to be hers. No further evidence has come to light.
This Recess could not be called a cave, because it was composed of various rooms… 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 that we could never seek a world beyond…

Sophia Lee, *The Recess* (1783–85)

The impatient assassins, regardless of her efforts, rushed upon their prey, and by overturning every thing which stood in their way, encreased [sic] the horror and confusion of the scene. Douglas, seizing Henry’s dagger, struck it in the body of Rizzio, who, screaming with fear and agony, was torn from Mary by the other conspirators, and pushed into the antichamber, where he was dispatched with fifty-six wounds. The unhappy princess, informed of his fate, immediately dried her tears, and said, she would weep no more; she would now think of revenge.


The historical specificity that Reeve introduced to the genre remained important in the next major work of Gothic fiction to be published after *The Old English Baron*. Based around the reign of Elizabeth I and the tragic history of Mary, Queen of Scots, Sophia Lee’s *The Recess; or, A Tale of Other Times* features two female narrators, Matilda and Ellinor; the (fictional) twin daughters of Mary by a secret marriage to the Duke of Norfolk. The twins are raised in an isolated, underground chamber known as “the Recess,” and Lee’s novel recounts their diverse and traumatic experiences of the outside world as fictional characters, circumstances and events collide with those of recorded history. Published between 1783 and 1785—approximately five years after the appearance of *The Old English Baron*—*The Recess* was heralded as an extraordinary development in English fiction, and, due to its similarity with certain accounts of England’s past, was frequently likened to both David Hume’s *The History of England* (1754–62) and William Robertson’s *The History of Scotland during the Reigns of Queen Mary and James VI* (1759). *The Recess* builds substantially on the level of historical detail contained in *The Old English Baron*. A wealth of real historical figures populate Lee’s late sixteenth-century past, the novel’s (fictional) heroines find themselves caught in the middle of numerous major historical events and, as a whole, the novel draws on the scandal and conspiracy that surrounds Elizabeth I’s reign. Historically inflected and utilising numerous Gothic
conventions, Lee’s novel proved immensely popular in the eighteenth century and beyond.¹

In contrast to Walpole’s Otranto and Reeve’s The Old English Baron, The Recess does not bear the words “a Gothic story” on its title page. This has led literary critics to dispute the classification and Gothic nature of Lee’s novel.² However, debates about the genre of the novel aside, The Recess’s influence on the development of Gothic fiction is indisputable. Lee’s novel is packed with Gothic themes and tropes; it encompasses decaying edifices, confused ancestry, incest, usurpation, motherless women, dreams, villains, family paintings, violence and anxieties surrounding Catholicism.³ As this chapter will demonstrate, Gothic themes of repressed histories, madness, entrapment, irrationality and acts of female persecution also feature prominently throughout The Recess. The very title of Lee’s novel has Gothic connotations. In the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “Recess” has a number of unsettling and sinister meanings: ‘A place of retirement, a remote and secluded spot, a secret or private place’, ‘A departure from some state or standard’, ‘A dark resource, a secret’. Like The Old English Baron, The Recess is a novel that has been critically neglected over the years, but has witnessed a resurgence of interest in the last decade or so. Lee’s novel is now discussed routinely in histories of Gothic fiction; rather than being mentioned briefly in passing, it has begun to receive chapter-length examinations, particularly in recent years.⁴ It is the intention of this chapter to further this trend by examining representations of the past in The Recess.

Beginning with an analysis of Lee’s attitude towards history, this discussion poses a number of questions. Why does Lee choose to set her Gothic novel during the reign of Elizabeth I? What does the marginalised Recess symbolise, and what is the significance of the novel’s emphasis on female experience? This chapter will demonstrate how Lee’s use of the Gothic varies from both Walpole’s and Reeve’s works by focusing more on gender issues and discussing subjects as diverse as concealed writings, the figure of the absent mother, women’s role in history, female inheritance, sensibility and the epistolary novel. The Recess represents a unique variant of the epistolary form in the sense that there is a complete lack of consensus; the memoir-letter written by Matilda (the elder twin and primary narrator) is counterpointed, contradicted and fragmented by her sister Ellinor’s letter. What is “Gothic” for Lee? What contemporary anxieties does her novel betray? What are the implications of her novel for historical writing, and what does her use of the epistolary say about the nature of the past? Throughout this chapter, I will show how Lee utilises the Gothic metaphor of entombment to comment on woman’s plight in the past and
present. Due to the fact that knowledge of Lee’s life and reading habits is limited, we cannot be certain that she had read Hume’s *The History of England*, William Robertson’s *The History of Scotland* or Tindal’s popular translation of Rapin’s *History of England*. However, as critics such as April Alliston and Anne H. Stevens have pointed out, certain passages of *The Recess* have remarkable similarities with Hume’s and Robertson’s accounts of the reign of Elizabeth I. Contending that *The Recess* represents a complex response to male dominated historical writing, this chapter endeavours to highlight the continuing importance of eighteenth-century historiography to the development of early Gothic literature. Before exploring such issues, I will begin with an examination of the historical context of *The Recess* and Lee’s decision to set her Gothic novel in the late sixteenth century.

**THE REIGN OF ELIZABETH I: HISTORY, THE GOTHIC AND LEE**

In contrast to Reeve’s decision to set *The Old English Baron* during the minority government of Henry VI, the reign of Elizabeth I is certainly a more obvious historical period within which to set a suspenseful Gothic novel. There are numerous aspects of this reign which have inherently “Gothic” elements about them, with savage, mysterious, and barbaric acts taking place. This chapter opened with an extract from Hume’s description of the brutal murder of David Rizzio—Mary, Queen of Scots’s secretary and adviser—in *The History of England*. Reminiscent of a scene from Renaissance drama, Hume’s impassioned prose and focus on violent incident would not be out of place in one of the numerous Gothic novels produced in the later eighteenth century. Even to historians committed to strict epistemological systems of historical enquiry and calm, measured prose, the events of this historical period stirred their creative faculties. The machinations of Elizabeth I’s reign fired the eighteenth century’s historical imagination. As Hume’s, Robertson’s and Rapin’s accounts of this period demonstrate, it was a period of protracted political conflict at home and abroad and a reign punctuated with instances of conflict, treachery, tragedy and violence. Elizabeth battled against a predominantly Catholic Europe intent on overturning the Protestant faith, and presided over England’s vast (and often bloody) expansion abroad. Uncompromising in her views and formidable in her actions, she did not hesitate to remove those deemed a risk to her government, even if they were close to her. For example, she had former royal favourites Robert Dudley (the Earl of Leicester) and Robert Devereux (the Earl of Essex) executed for revolting against her regime. However, perhaps most significantly in terms of *The Recess*, this is a historical period dominated by the volatile
relationship between two female figures: Elizabeth, and her mortal enemy, Mary, Queen of Scots. Mary was implicated in the murder of Lord Darnley (Mary’s husband and claimant to the English throne) by a series of documents of dubious authenticity that became known as the Casket Letters. Despite doubts about their probity, Elizabeth used them as an excuse to keep Mary as a prisoner in England and stain her reputation across Western Europe. Replete with conspiracies, repressed pasts, imprisonments, poisonings, bitter jealousies, threats of usurpation, tyrannical behaviour and acts of revenge, the reign of Elizabeth has all the hallmarks of a romance.

Lee says as much in the advertisement to *The Recess*. ‘A wonderful coincidence of events stamps the narration at least with probability’, she writes, ‘and the reign of Elizabeth was that of romance’ (R 5). ‘If this Lady was not the child of fancy’, she continues, ‘her fate can hardly be paralleled; and the line of which she came has been marked by an eminent historian, as one distinguished alike by splendor and misery’ (R 5). With the border between history and literature, fact and fiction, reason and romance, almost indistinguishable in discussions of the events of Elizabeth’s reign, it is the perfect historical period in which to set a spellbinding Gothic novel. Akin to the rumours of forgotten, sinister histories that are central to eighteenth-century Gothic novels, England’s recorded history during this period becomes a series of rumours, conjectures and conspiracy theories. Lee fashions a Gothic narrative out of the unsaid and unseen of history and draws on the themes of secrecy, persecution and betrayal that dominate historians’ descriptions of this period. In Lee’s hands, the Gothic continues to be fixated on violent and repressed pasts. She uses fiction to reveal the absences that are endemic of the historical record and to expose the weaknesses of Enlightenment historiography.

Furthermore, it is important to note the renewed relevance of Elizabeth’s reign—and the historical figure of Mary, Queen of Scots—towards the end of the eighteenth century. As E. J. Clery notes (2004, 40–41), in terms of colonial expansion and Catholic anxieties, the reign of Elizabeth bore a number of resemblances to the state of late eighteenth-century England. Furthermore, with the publication of documents such as the Burghley State Papers in 1759, much of the contemporary source material concerning Mary was made available for the first time. Debates about Mary’s character and her involvement in Darnley’s murder became known as the “Marian Controversy” and such discussions dominated the male world of eighteenth-century historiography. Historians such as Hume and Robertson employed their Enlightenment methods of historical enquiry to try and solve once and for all the mysterious events of Elizabeth’s reign and the enigma of Mary’s
character. However, despite their endeavours, doubt and uncertainty continued to plague such subjects.

In *The History of England*, Hume asserts to the authenticity of the Casket Letters, describing them as ‘incontestible proofs’ of Mary’s guilt (*HE* 4: 113). Objections made to their authenticity are of ‘small force’, he adds (*HE* 4: 114). Hume was so passionate about the genuineness of the Casket Letters that he endeavoured to convince his friend and fellow historian, Robertson, of their truth. In *The History of Scotland*, Robertson is not so confident and argues that ‘none of the points in question could be decided with certainty’ (1761, 2: iv). However, by November 1758, Robertson seems to have concurred with Hume (Hume 1932, 1: 287–90). Meanwhile, apologists of Mary rejected such notions and intensified the debate. For example, Walter Goodall’s *An Examination of the Letters said to be written by Mary Queen of Scots, to James Earl of Bothwell: Shewing By intrinsick and extrinsick Evidence, that they are Forgeries* (1754) sought to highlight the erroneous nature of the Casket Letters, whilst William Tytler’s *Inquiry* (1760) directly confronted Hume’s conclusions in *The History of England* and offered a vindication of Mary’s character. Indeed, Tytler’s *Inquiry* rattled Hume and, in a letter to Alexander Dick in August 1760, he modifies his stance. He argues that Mary’s guilt is ‘far from resting solely on the Letters’, targets flaws in her character, and cites her silence in regard to the evidence as a ‘Proof of Guilt’ (Hume 1954, 59–64). The widespread debate and fervour surrounding the validity of the Casket Letters in eighteenth-century culture more than likely proved the catalyst for Lee’s ambitious rewriting of the enigmatic events of Elizabeth’s I’s reign. Lee challenges the androcentrism of such historical debates by writing a Gothic novel that offers an imaginative, alternative view on such subjects. Utilising the same means as Reeve, but for entirely different ends, the Gothic enables Lee to enter the forbidden realm of male dominated eighteenth-century historiography.

**THE RECESS, THE FEMALE GOTHIC AND HISTORY**

Before I focus on Lee’s use of the Gothic to access historical discourse, it is important to emphasise the prominent role of gender politics in *The Recess* and to discuss notions of the Female Gothic. *The Recess* represents a major innovation in the development of Gothic fiction in the sense that it is narrated in the first person by women. Gothic pasts have, of course, been concerned with gender issues, and particularly the subject of female persecution, since the beginning. At the start of *Otranto*, Manfred’s son and Isabella’s husband-to-be, Conrad, is killed shortly before his wedding. In an arranged meeting shortly
after this tragic event, Manfred compels Isabella to forget his son and marry him, as he now requires a male heir. We learn that ‘words cannot paint the horror of the princess’s situation’ and that Isabella’s ‘dread of Manfred soon outweighed every other terror’ (O 26–27). Manfred’s wife, Hippolita, also suffers badly as a result of her husband’s tyrannical behaviour. Reeve’s fictional fifteenth-century past in The Old English Baron is pervaded by a tragic female cast. Margery Twyford suffers a miscarriage and is violently abused by her husband, Emma is a pawn in a male power-struggle and Edmund’s mother, the Baroness Lovel, meets a tragic end. However, in contrast to Walpole’s Gothic novel and Reeve’s Loyalist Gothic work, there is a much greater emphasis on female experience and subjectivity in The Recess. Using the intimate, first person form of the epistolary, Lee adds psychological depth to Otranto’s detached descriptions of female fear and, in contrast to The Old English Baron, moves women from the margins to the centre of her work.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, despite being written by a woman and alluding to marginal female histories, The Old English Baron cannot really be considered as an example of the Female Gothic. In keeping with its Loyalist Gothic agenda, Reeve’s novel is more concerned with the actions of (fictional) great men of history and rousing patriotism than interrogating gender politics. Although, as I have already mentioned, Lee’s novel engages with debates surrounding Britain’s colonial expansion, its abiding concern is with gender issues. Indeed, it is Lee’s female-centric The Recess which marks the first ‘early statement’ of the Female Gothic (Kelly 2002, xxxiii). The Female Gothic—a fiercely contested term—has a long and complex history, and, beyond the working definition outlined here, it is not the premise of this chapter to become embroiled in such debates. Rather, as I have suggested, the Female Gothic can be read as a politically subversive branch of Gothic fiction, which privileges female subjectivity and which enables women writers to utilise certain Gothic tropes to express fears and anxieties about dominant patriarchal structures and women’s marginalised role in society and history. As this chapter (and the following one) will show, in contrast to previous Gothic texts, there is a much greater emphasis on female rights, inheritances and concealed writings in the pasts of Female Gothic fiction. The narrative lens is firmly on the persecuted heroines, their domestic imprisonment in castles and abbeys, and their larger historical plight.

In contrast to Reeve, Lee uses the Gothic not only to access the male dominated realm of historiography, but to comment on and critique it. Pioneering the Female Gothic by writing about events through the eyes of her persecuted heroines, Lee utilises romance to provide a new, female angle of historical vision; a perspective which contrasts with
Enlightenment histories written by the likes of Hume, Rapin and Robertson in cultivating a sentimental engagement with the past. In contrast to Reeve’s interpretation of the “Gothic” as something ancient, liberating and time-honoured, the term has a very different meaning for Lee. Harking back to Walpole’s Otranto, the Gothic signifies anything oppressive, barbaric and superstitious in The Recess. Throughout the course of this chapter, I will show how Lee hijacks certain themes and tropes manifest in Walpole’s and Reeve’s fictions and adapts them in order to probe women’s repression in the past and the present.

HISTORICAL ENTRAPMENT: GOTHIC VILLAINS AND PERSECUTED HEROINES

Although ordinary women are excluded from history (as I will discuss in more detail later), eminent women feature prominently in eighteenth-century historiography. Indeed, as I have already indicated, two eminent female figures loomed particularly large in the eighteenth-century historical imagination: Elizabeth and Mary, Queen of Scots. Even though Robertson’s and Rapin’s histories show similar traits, and could have been usefully compared to Lee’s The Recess, my discussion will use Hume’s The History of England—the most popular work of eighteenth-century historiography and a probable source for Lee’s historical information—to elucidate some of the ways she uses the Female Gothic to critique male history. Following Elizabeth’s death, Hume conducts his habitual character assessment and presents her as a heroine. He is full of praise for this female monarch, arguing that there are fewer ‘great personages in history’ than Elizabeth (HE 4: 351). However, the characteristics he acclaims are predominantly those associated with ideals of manhood; Elizabeth is praised for her ‘rigorous’, ‘imperious’ nature and the ‘vigour’, ‘vigilance’, ‘penetration’, ‘constancy’ and ‘heroism’ that she exhibited during her reign (HE 4: 351–52). Hume recognises that a certain controversy surrounds Elizabeth in regards to a ‘consideration of her sex’ (HE 4: 352). He notes that, when contemplating her as a woman, one is simultaneously struck with her many (predominantly masculine) qualities and yet, is aware that she lacks ‘some of those amiable weaknesses by which her sex is distinguished’, such as ‘softness of disposition’ and a ‘greater lenity of temper’ (HE 4: 352). However, Hume dispels such thoughts, choosing to consider her as a sovereign, a ‘rational being’ entrusted ‘with the government of mankind’, rather than as ‘a wife or mistress’ (HE 4: 353).

Hume’s analysis of Elizabeth’s character betrays the gender-bias that pervades the historical values not only of The History of England, but much eighteenth-century history written by men. Indeed, to use Bonnie G. Smith’s words, Hume’s language in The History
of England (and much male-dominated eighteenth-century historiography) duplicates the language of a universalised manhood (1998, 141). The theoretical frameworks and paradigms that are employed to write the past in The History of England embody the ideals of eighteenth-century masculinity: authority, self-regulation, confidence and a representation of universality; the requisition of the composed, coherent and distanced mind to transcend contingencies such as chance, nationality and race; and the need to complete hard work by adhering to strict methods (Smith 1998, 141). Eighteenth-century historiography written by historians such as Hume does not exclude eminent women from history; it judges them and represents them by using male values. Femininity is inherently weak and inferior in Hume’s eyes and he is keen to spot what he perceives as woman’s failings. It is almost as if, because Elizabeth exhibits more male qualities than so called “weak” feminine traits, she is a source of perennial admiration.

Indeed, Hume’s representation of Elizabeth lays bare the gender politics that underpin eighteenth-century historiography. Such gendered historical representations are even more apparent when Hume’s treatment of Elizabeth’s bitter enemy, Mary, Queen of Scots, is examined. Despite doubts surrounding Mary’s involvement in Darnley’s murder, Hume is certain of ‘her consent to the king’s murder’ (HE 4: 113) and, even though he acknowledges the bitter jealousy Elizabeth exhibits towards Mary, the emphasis is more on Mary’s transgressions and inherent criminality than on the misery and suffering inflicted on her by England’s reigning monarch. Hume highlights the many ‘dangers, which arose from the character, principles, and pretensions of the queen of Scots’ (HE 4: 222) and highlights how her actions continually ‘threatened the repose and authority of Elizabeth’ (HE 4: 222–23). The Catholic unrest associated with Mary colours her representation and Hume condemns her involvement in numerous conspiracies to assassinate Elizabeth (HE 4: 227). In his concluding character analysis of Mary, Hume argues that an ‘enumeration of her qualities might carry the appearance of panegyric; an account of her conduct must, in some parts, wear the aspect of severe satire and invective’ (HE 4: 252). Although Hume does show sympathy towards her (particularly in his description of her execution), he continually suggests that there is something intrinsically villainous about Mary, and decides instead to focus on her physical appearance. Indeed, she becomes subject to Hume’s male gaze. He commends the ‘beauties’ of Mary’s person, her ‘lovely form’ and gentility, and applauds that ‘she seemed to partake only so much of the male virtues as to render her estimable, without relinquishing those soft graces, which compose the proper ornament of her sex’ (HE 4: 251). Hume may suggest that Elizabeth lacks such virtues,
but, by focusing almost exclusively on these aspects of Mary’s character, his account is voyeuristic and somewhat belittling. Refusing to comment on the motivations for her actions—and the dubious evidence that led to her imprisonment—Hume does not treat Mary as a historical figure who may have been greatly wronged; instead, she becomes merely an object of physical admiration for him. When describing her female qualities, Hume’s tone is also quite condescending; using Elizabeth’s ruthlessness, clear-sightedness and rationality (male ideals) as a yardstick to judge other female figures, he is quite patronising in his assessment of Mary being commendable for her ‘polite’, ‘gentle’, ‘affable’ (*HE 4*: 251) and warm manners (qualities traditionally associated with femininity).

In *The Recess*, Lee is acutely aware of such gendered readings of the past. Utilising Gothic tropology and the woman-centrism of the Female Gothic, she sets about subverting such male historical values. In contrast to Hume’s representation of Elizabeth as a heroine, Lee presents her as a despotic figure: she is variously described as an ‘inexorable tyrant’ (*R* 81) in whom ‘self-preservation’ as opposed to compassion is an ‘unconquerable principle’ (*R* 33). ‘The eye of Elizabeth became yet more dreadful to me’, recalls Matilda; ‘I fancied every moment it dived into my heart, and death for ever seemed to surround me in forms yet dearer to me than my own’ (*R* 91). Reminiscent of the malicious Manfred in *Otranto* and the wicked Walter Lovel in *The Old English Baron*, Elizabeth is cast as an evil Gothic villain in *The Recess*. She terrorises the twin protagonists (particularly Ellinor) and tyrannises Mary, Queen of Scots. The enmity that Hume acknowledges Elizabeth felt for Mary—and that he deems of marginal importance in terms of her successful reign—consumes her in *The Recess*. Elizabeth is filled with ‘jealousy and hatred’ (*R* 24) of Mary and, whilst holding her prisoner, we learn that she ‘cut her daily off from some comfort or convenience; frequently changed her keepers and prison; and by her severity, taught the captive Queen that hatred may be stronger than love’ (*R* 34). Perhaps the most significant remark concerning Elizabeth comes from Mrs Marlow (the woman that raises Matilda and Ellinor in the Recess), who describes her as a woman whose ‘heart was more full of policy than feeling’ (*R* 26). To use Jane Spencer’s words, Elizabeth is portrayed as a ‘woman who has turned away from womanly values’ (1986, 196). The very male ideals that underpin Hume’s laudatory representation of Elizabeth—authority, ruthlessness, strength of mind—make her a figure of fear, horror and trepidation in Lee’s novel.

If Elizabeth is the Gothic villain in *The Recess*, Mary plays the role of the persecuted female victim. Where Hume turns away from a consideration of Mary’s actions
in disgust and chooses, rather condescendingly, to focus solely on her physical appearance, *The Recess* draws attention to the horrific trials she has to endure at the hands of the tyrannical Elizabeth. Casting her as a typically beautiful Gothic female victim, Lee does acknowledge her physical attributes, but these are not the basis of her historical representation (*R* 10). The sense of innate criminality and Catholic distrust that typifies eighteenth-century historiographical responses to Mary are also absent. Mary may not always help herself and have a tendency to be ruled by her feelings, but it is her oppression by the formidable Elizabeth that drives her to desperation. ‘Estranged from all society’, writes Lee, ‘the Queen of Scots gave herself up to the blackest despair; she had, alas! no hope to soften her captivity, no bosom to receive her tears’ (*R* 34). Even though Hume and Robertson do express sympathy for Mary’s plight, Lee amplifies it and focuses on her dire situation. In *The History of England*, Hume does not doubt the validity of the Casket Letters and Mary’s guilt. Exploiting the historical ambiguity surrounding these artefacts, *The Recess* challenges this: Mary’s ‘innocence’ (*R* 26) is referred to on a number of occasions and, at one point, she is referred to as a ‘Queen, innocent at least in all that respected her’ (*R* 35). Accused of being ‘criminal’ and forced to ‘give herself up a prisoner to a government she had never offended’ (*R* 25), she is movingly described as an ‘exile from her country, a prisoner in another, a wife without a right to that name, and a mother, while a stranger to her children’ (*R* 33).

Inverting the values and characterisations of these two famous historical women, Lee casts Elizabeth as a tyrannical Gothic villain and Mary as a persecuted victim in order to draw attention to the male ethics and ideals that shape eighteenth-century historiography. Her representations of these historical figures act as foils to Hume’s *The History of England* and much male-centred eighteenth-century historiography. By presenting such radically different portraits of these two famous historical females, *The Recess* interrogates notions of historical accuracy and furthers the Gothic’s obsession with tenuous connections to the past. Using the perspective afforded by the Female Gothic, Lee demonstrates that what eighteenth-century historiography records about women is ‘refracted through the lens of men’s observation’ (Lerner 1981, 174). Exploiting the obscurity and uncertainty of the historical record and focusing on the villain’s (Elizabeth’s) persecution of a helpless female protagonist (Mary), Lee shows how women are essentially imprisoned within male codes of historical representation. Exploiting the Gothic’s identification of the past as a site of conflict and transferring the figure of Mary from history to the realm of Gothic romance, Lee shows how eighteenth-century history does
not ignore eminent women; it entraps them within male norms and criteria, and, as a result, has the potential to stain the reputations of women who do not conform to male ideals. When it comes to “ordinary” women, the historical situation is even more disturbing. In terms of *The Recess*, Elizabeth and Mary are quite marginal presences; the focus is predominantly on the two female protagonists, Matilda and Ellinor. A key theme of the Female Gothic is the unwanted legacy of the mother, and, unfortunately for the ‘twin heirs of misfortune’ (*R* 270), they share a similar form of historical incarceration to their mother. Using a prominent Gothic trope, Lee transfers the sense of (male) historical distortion surrounding Mary onto her daughters and, by doing so, comments on the larger theme of women in history.

**THE RECESS, HISTORY AND GHOSTLY WOMEN**

The most identifiable Gothic element of Lee’s novel is the ruined Recess itself. As the epigraph to this chapter indicates, it is in this underground chamber that Matilda and Ellinor are raised by Mrs Marlow, in ‘total ignorance of their birth till able to know its inutility’ (*R* 32). Fearing the reprisals that would accompany the discovery of the twins’ identity, they are forced to endure a life of seclusion in this mouldering edifice, away from the sunlight and the world beyond. Serving as a substitute for Walpole’s and Reeve’s Gothic castles, the Recess contains various subterranean vaults and passages, as well as ancestral portraits. As Rictor Norton notes, this underground structure has a complex role in the novel: it is a place of concealment which functions simultaneously as ‘a sanctuary and a prison, a place of refuge and a den of horror’ (Norton 2000, 13). Once the twins have left the confines of the Recess and endure harrowing experiences in the wider world, they often look back on it as a ‘calm retirement from the odious forms and cares of life’ (*R* 34). However, despite such nostalgia, this underground chamber is the site of much of the novel’s terror. It is here that Matilda and Ellinor are menaced by the evil Williams—a former servant of Lord Leicester’s who betrays him—and his banditti. As Matilda vividly recalls, the Recess—a place ‘sacred once to piety and innocence’—was now the ‘shelter of rapine, perhaps murder’ (*R* 99). Both twins are forcefully imprisoned and threatened by the prospect of violence and abuse. Before escaping, Leicester murders Williams within the Recess’s walls (*R* 103). Indeed, throughout the novel, the Recess is frequently represented as a place of imprisonment: Matilda refers to it variously as a ‘prison’ (*R* 15), ‘a horrible dungeon’ (*R* 34) and speaks of feeling ‘entombed alive’ (*R* 10) within its confines.
This image of being buried alive is significant, especially when considered alongside the historical dimension that Lee attaches to the Recess. Mrs Marlow relates that this ancient edifice was formerly a convent ‘inhabited by nuns of the order of St. Winifred’, but was destroyed during the English Reformation (R 22). ‘In this situation it remained many years, shunned by the country people’, she adds, ‘and devoutly visited by those travellers whom chance or curiosity brought this way’ (R 22). During the Reformation and the oppression of Roman Catholics in England of Henry VIII’s reign, it became a hiding place for monks (R 22–23). ‘Thus, in a few years’, relates Mrs Marlow, ‘a monastery was hid among the ruins of the convent’ (R 23). Once the final inhabitants had left, the existence of the Recess was kept a secret for many years. The historical aspect of the Recess does not end here. When the twins first go above ground, we learn that the entrance to it is hidden by a ‘high-raised tomb’ of a ‘famous knight’, surrounded by ensigns. Observing this memorial, Matilda notes that a ‘meagre skeleton had struck an arrow through his shield into his heart; his eyes were turned to the cross which St. Winifred held before him’ (R 37). The twins are surrounded by images of death, burial and entombment. Akin to their own existence, they encounter material artefacts of a forgotten past; a secret history which is only remembered by those connected to the decaying convent. Surveying the ruins that surround the Recess, Matilda describes the scene as ‘wild and awful to excess’ and she is overawed by the ‘vast heaps of stones’, the fragmented pillars, and the ‘clusters and spires of ivy’ which surround their ‘mouldering’ tops (R 37).

As the complex history of the Recess reveals, it is a structure that has multiple levels of meaning within the novel. Indeed, the images of concealment and burial that are associated with it work on literal, figurative and historical levels. With its links to the Reformation, the decaying Recess functions as a symbol of England’s traumatic history. Written in the wake of the recent Gordon Riots (1780), this building serves as a timely material reminder of the historico-political upheaval from which ‘the alliance of church and state of the eighteenth century had emerged’ (Sweet 2004, 233). Perhaps more significantly in terms of the current discussion, however, is the fact that the Recess used to be a convent. As Jane Spencer points out, as a former nunnery, the Recess is a powerful ‘reminder of lost female communities and lost female power’ (1986, 198). Though Anne H. Stevens describes the Recess as an ‘ahistorical space’ (2003, 270), Lee’s detailed historical construction of this structure is more complex than this. In a strange paradox, the Recess is a building steeped in history, and yet outside it; it is a profoundly historical structure, but below or on the margins of history. Drawing attention to an edifice that
embodies female agency in the past—and a structure replete with the secret histories of nuns and monks—Lee continues the work Walpole started by using Gothic tropes to probe history’s blind spots. Lee wants us to believe that the decaying nunnery is an important, and yet ignored, aspect of England’s conflicted past. Indeed, Lee employs the Gothic convention of the decaying edifice—in this instance, the ruined Recess—to highlight that, much like Ellinor and Matilda, women are “entombed” in history. Below ground and out of view, the Recess is synonymous with the oppression and general absence of ordinary women in history; it is a symbol of their historiographic marginalisation. Focusing on the tombs and memorials that surround Matilda and Ellinor, this ancient structure serves as a metaphor for the buried lives of ordinary women in history (or those sidelined by it).

The issue that Lee utilises the Gothic—and, more precisely, the Gothic trope of the decaying castle or building—to address, is perhaps most clearly stated in Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1798–99). The novel’s female protagonist, Catherine Morland, is thoroughly disillusioned with history’s focus on ‘the quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all’ (Austen 2003, 104). Even though, as April Alliston points out, Lee rewrites history through ‘female viewpoints unverifiable by a historiography that excludes such viewpoints’ (1996, 122), women in the novel are still exterior to the historical events recounted. Like the Recess itself, Matilda and Ellinor remain strangely at the centre of history, but removed from it. Indeed, the twins have a haunting presence throughout the novel. Pale and fatigued, Matilda refers to herself at one point as ‘more like a spectre than myself’ (R 60). In a similar vein, Ellinor describes her life as ‘visionary’; ‘seen without being known; adored, without being esteemed; punished without being guilty; applauded without being meritorious, we were all an illusion’, she argues (R 157). Critics who have contested the Gothic nature of *The Recess*, such as Robert Hume, often point to the absence of the supernatural in the novel (1969, 283–84). Indeed, Lee is generally perceived as continuing Reeve’s work by “taming” the Gothic and removing some of its wilder, Walpolean excesses. However, Lee’s Female Gothic novel is more complicated than this. Anticipating Ann Radcliffe’s use of the “explained supernatural,” paranormal occurrences may be absent from the novel, but Lee nevertheless appropriates the Gothic’s obsession with phantoms and images of death. During her imprisonment in the Arlington residence, Ellinor affects an escape by pretending to be the corpse of a recently deceased maid: ‘when placing myself and treasure in the homely coffin, I was boldly conveyed like the Empress
Maud through the midst of my enemies’, she writes (R 218). As Jayne Elizabeth Lewis notes, gripped by madness, Ellinor ‘becomes a ghost in the eyes of others’ (R 180).

In one of the novel’s most famous scenes, Ellinor (now mentally deranged due to her various sufferings) bursts into Queen Elizabeth’s chamber. Presuming that she is dead, Elizabeth believes that the presence before her is a ‘ghastly spectre’ (R 266). Ellinor is described as a ‘beauteous phantom’ while her ‘long garments of black flowed gracefully over the floor’ (R 266). ‘[F]or surely never mortal looked so like an inhabitant of another world’, writes Lady Pembroke (R 266). In this scene, a variety of circumstances combine to ‘give this strange visitation the appearance of being supernatural’ (R 268). For Lee, there is no need to feature ghosts and instances of the supernatural in her Female Gothic narrative; when it comes to history, women are always already spectres. Even though the narrative lens is fixed on the trials of Matilda and Ellinor, they are always outside of the male-dominated world of history; denied entry into this world, they haunt it instead. Matilda and Ellinor symbolise the women who populate the past, but have been forgotten by traditional modes of historiography; they represent fictional presences of real, ordinary historical females. Moreover, it is not only in the historical realm that women are depicted as unsubstantial or ghostly. Lee employs the lens of the Female Gothic and its propensity for using the past as a subterfuge to comment on the present in order to paint a deeply disturbing picture of the lives of eighteenth-century women.

**BURIED WRITINGS: WOMEN, HISTORY AND CIVIL DEATH**

Lee not only hijacks and adapts the Gothic trope of the remote, decaying edifice to comment on women’s role in history, she also utilises the Gothic theme of concealed writings. As the previous two chapters of this thesis have demonstrated, the Gothic is fixated with secret histories and buried writings. The first editions of Walpole’s *Otranto* and Reeve’s *The Old English Baron* are presented as ancient, forgotten manuscripts. Furthermore, Reeve wants the reader to believe that the manuscript she has translated is a patchwork of legal proceedings and letters. Lee substantially develops this aspect of Gothic fiction. Not only are the twins effectively buried underground; Lee wants us to believe that the original documents detailing their history—and which she claims to have translated—are concealed in an obscure casket (R 326). At the end of the novel, Matilda bequeaths a casket to Adelaide Marie De Montmorenci, the person to whom her memoirs are addressed (R 326). The reader assumes that the memoir-letters that comprise *The Recess* are stored in this casket, which is later discovered—and its contents translated—in the eighteenth
century (or so Lee would have us believe). Moreover, concealed writings play a major role throughout Lee’s Female Gothic novel; she uses them to critique both women’s marginalisation in history and their repression in her own time.

A particularly notable episode that features buried writings involves Ellinor. During a confrontation, Queen Elizabeth throws a large book at Ellinor, rendering her senseless (R 119). When the laces on her dress are cut to aid her breathing, the ‘eager eyes’ of Elizabeth spot a ‘small pacquet suspended to the black ribbon she always wore round her neck’ (R 119). We learn that this ‘pacquet’ conceals the ‘duplicate proof’ of the twins’ true ancestry; whilst Matilda keeps hers (at least at this stage in proceedings) treasured in a ‘secret cabinet at Kenilworth’ Castle, Ellinor keeps hers on her own person (R 120). Ravishing the document from Ellinor’s body, Elizabeth immediately recognises its significance and promptly tears the document ‘into atoms’ (R 119). With the loss of these documents, Ellinor effectively loses her identity; she becomes unsure of who she is and eventually lapses into madness and insanity. Using the Gothic’s focus on concealed writings and casting Elizabeth as a tyrannical Gothic villain, Lee demonstrates how women have been sidelined and, in this instance, completely erased from history. After her proof of birth is destroyed and she lapses into insanity, the only historical record that exists of Ellinor is via her own handwritten accounts and the other long-forgotten writings that comprise The Recess. This episode is just one of many in the novel that focuses on the relationship between female identity and documents. Such scenes have an even greater significance in the context of women’s lives and legal status in the eighteenth century.

Reminiscent of The Old English Baron, the past is often the present in disguise in The Recess. Lee uses the Gothic’s focus on concealed documents, the law and inheritance in order to critique the lives of women in her own century. In Lee’s age, the male-dominated law meant that many women had no social and financial independence. William Blackstone’s influential Commentaries on the Laws of England (1765–69)—the standard textbook for trainee lawyers in the eighteenth-century—explains a woman’s legal position once she is married:

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs every thing (1765–69, 1: 430)

Blackstone’s image of a woman’s legal identity being ‘suspended’ during marriage is quite Gothic in itself. In Lee’s eighteenth century, the patriarchal legal system meant that many
females were denied autonomy and were rendered almost entirely dependent on their husbands. As a result of primogeniture, many women were deprived of any inheritance when their husbands died; that privilege usually went to the eldest son, who, by law, was considered the head of the family. Indeed, as Marcia Pointon highlights, once a woman was married she was ‘considerably disadvantaged with regard to her legal status since common law regarded her as feme covert’ (1997, 34). Utilising the emphasis on gender rights provided by the Female Gothic and exploiting the trope of buried writings, Lee examines the inheritance restrictions placed upon women in *The Recess*.

In this sense, another important incident involving concealed writings and female inheritance occurs when Matilda returns to Kenilworth Castle after the death of her husband, Lord Leicester. She recalls how one night she aided her late husband in placing ‘several caskets, for which he seemed more than commonly anxious’, in ‘secure and unknown cabinets’ located in the premises. Matilda notes how she also added ‘Mrs Marlow’s papers’ and ‘testimonials’ of her birth (*R* 273). *The Recess* continues to exploit the Gothic’s obsession with secret locations and hidden papers. With Mrs Arundel’s help, Matilda has now returned to recover the ‘well-remembered caskets’ (*R* 275). In typical Gothic fashion, she locates the ‘secret spring of the cabinet’ (*R* 275) behind a bed, opens it and begins to explore the contents of the caskets:

> The largest was filled with family papers, bonds, contracts, mortgages, many of which were to me unintelligible, and all useless. The next contained letters and little ornaments, less precious from their intrinsic value, than their analogy to particular events—under these was a gilt casket filled with jewels of great value, and what was of infinitely more, the authenticated bonds and acknowledgements of all the sums Lord Leicester had informed me he had providently deposited in other countries; and of which I knew not any memorandum remained (*R* 275–76)

Matilda’s inheritance does not end here. ‘The next casket was a gift from the fond mother to the darling of her heart’, she writes, before explaining how it ‘contained all the testimonials of the Queen of Scots, and other parties concerned, on the subject of my birth, with the contract of marriage between Lord Leicester and myself’ (*R* 276). ‘I felt rich in these recovered rights’, pronounces Matilda. Allied with Ellinor’s experience, this episode serves to demonstrate how women are defined by documents in *The Recess*. Perhaps the most significant facet of this scene is her recognition of how important the recovery of the caskets is to the ‘welfare’ of her young daughter, Mary (*R* 273). As on many other occasions in *The Recess*, documents are more valuable than gold and jewellery. Matilda is aware that the manuscripts found in the caskets restore her own and, more importantly, her
daughter’s legitimacy, ancestry and legal identity. With these documents, young Mary will not suffer the same fate as her mother, and will, in theory, be able to claim the life that she is entitled to. Matilda even dares to dream of one day claiming an alliance between herself, her daughter and King James I (R 276).

Matilda may believe that she has preserved a lasting legacy for her daughter, but it is cruelly snatched away from her. Attempting to turn her dream into a reality and to restore her own and her daughter’s ancestral links to the monarchy, Matilda gathers the manuscripts found in the caskets at Kenilworth castle and reveals them to King James I. She takes literally ‘every paper, and proof’ that authenticates her rights, including the documents containing the ‘unquestioned handwriting’ of her mother, Mary, Queen of Scots (R 300–301). Although initially hospitable, the King betrays Matilda, imprisoning her and her daughter and destroying the legal documents. As in Ellinor’s experience, Matilda realises, to her horror, that young Mary’s (and, indeed, her own) identity is essentially terminated along with the documents:

Rescued, in yet unconscious childhood, from slavery, neglect, and obscurity, fortune at one moment seemed willing to restore all the rights of your birth, when a weak, credulous mother assisted the cruel wretch who was pre-determined to entomb you, and annihilate every trace, every memorial, of our dear and honoured progenitors.—Nameless—dishonoured—your blooming youth must wither in an unknown prison—blighted by the tears of a parent who can never pardon herself the extravagant error produced by over-fondness.—I knew the King to be mean, base, subtle, yet I madly delivered into his treacherous hands every thing on which our hopes, nay, even our vindication must be grounded (R 306)

Reminiscent of how Mary, Queen of Scots, may have been effectively destroyed through the male manipulation of the Casket Letters, Matilda’s and young Mary’s social existence is virtually eradicated by the King’s decision to destroy the documents. Young Mary is soon poisoned by the jealous wife of her lover, Lord Somerset (R 316), and, after witnessing the death of her beloved daughter, Matilda is forced to spend the rest of her days alone as an exile (R 325). Without documents, women are rendered powerless in Lee’s novel.

The past communicates with the present in The Recess and Lee manipulates the Gothic’s obsession with obscure papers to present a nightmare vision of a world where women’s lives have been reduced to documents. There is a dialogue between the 1580s and the 1780s and, reminiscent of Blackstone’s remarks, women in Lee’s Female Gothic novel do not have an identity independent of marriage. When their husbands die and they
are left to fend for themselves, they become even more invisible and ghostly. Whereas
Reeve’s Loyalist Gothic work upheld the law as a bastion of order and civility, Lee’s
Female Gothic novel presents it as something inherently misogynistic; as a male-driven,
impersonal force that imprisons and socially suffocates women. Utilising Gothic tropology
and focusing on the plight of women in the sixteenth century, The Recess conducts a bitter
critique of eighteenth-century law, and, more specifically, marital law. Functioning as
ciphers for women of her own time, Matilda’s and Ellinor’s tenuous and phantasmal
existence through a series of secretive legal documents reveals how women are effectively
“dead” within dominant male power structures such as the law. To use Mary R. Beard’s
words, one of the abiding images of The Recess—and, for that matter, the Female
Gothic—is that of woman, past and present, as ‘being always and everywhere subject to
male man or as a ghostly creature too shadowy to be even that real’ (1946, 77). According
with Blackstone’s comments on women’s suspension of identity when wedded, Matilda
and Ellinor experience a form of civil death during and after marriage. To adapt the words
of Tamar Heller, Lee utilises the Gothic’s focus on female persecution and concealed
writings in order to highlight woman’s perennial historiographic, legal and economic
‘identitylessness’ (Heller 1992, 2). Critiquing eighteenth-century gender ideology through
her use of Gothic tropology, Lee reveals how patriarchy is maintained by depriving women
of their inheritance and, ultimately, writing women out of society and history.

THE CURSE OF THE MOTHER: WOMEN AND THE PERILS OF SENSIBILITY
As well as marital law, another source of unease for Lee is sensibility. When Walpole
described Otranto as an ‘attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the
modern’ (O 9), the Gothic became inextricably linked with novels of sensibility. By
referring to ‘modern’ romances and comparing his work to ‘drama’ (O 6), Walpole
motions towards (what is now called) the eighteenth-century novel and the sentimental
works of Samuel Richardson.13 In Otranto, Hippolita and Isabella are frequently shown
crying and fainting. In the previous chapter, I commented on the tension between
sensibility and ownership in The Old English Baron and how Reeve was influenced by
Richardsonian didacticism. However, it is in the Female Gothic that the cult of sensibility,
which had always been part of the Gothic, is at its most visible and where it receives its
most incisive analysis. Indeed, in The Recess, the cult of sensibility is a subject of intense
scrutiny; eighteenth-century sensibility is mapped anachronistically onto the 1590s.
Similarly to sentimental novels written by Richardson and Henry Mackenzie, the novel is
replete with a variety of spontaneous emotional acts such as swooning, crying and embracing. As Janet Todd notes, differing from sentiment, the term sensibility came to denote spontaneous and ‘delicate emotional and physical susceptibility’; it referred to ‘the faculty of feeling, the capacity for extremely refined emotion and a quickness to display compassion for suffering’ (1986, 7). A particularly significant example of such spontaneous emotion occurs in the reclusive Recess when Matilda and Ellinor look upon an ancestral portrait—a staple Gothic device since Otranto—of a ‘lady in the flower of youth, drest in mourning, and seeming in every feature to be marked by sorrow’ (R 10). Although the twins do not know at this stage that they are looking at a portrait of their mother, Mary, Queen of Scots, Matilda relates how the poignant image ‘seemed to call forth a thousand melting sensations; the tears rushed involuntarily into our eyes, and, clasping, we wept upon the bosoms of each other’ (R 10). This display of sensibility over the absent mother is particularly significant. Intertwined with the subject of sensibility, the absent mother plays a major role in The Recess. From Lee’s novel onwards, motherless daughters loom large in the Female Gothic imagination.

Influenced by novels of sensibility, The Recess encourages readers to engage sympathetically with certain characters and events, and cultivates a sentimental engagement with the past. However, such emotive aspects of Lee’s novel and the extent to which it can be considered as a novel of sensibility have been discussed at length elsewhere. Rather, my focus here remains on The Recess as a Gothic work and, more precisely, as a (prototypical) Female Gothic novel. Lee’s novel may employ certain aspects used in the sentimental novel, but its main concern is with the cult of sensibility in her own age and the impact it had on women’s lives. Lee’s novel may appear to masquerade as a novel of sensibility, but, in accordance with the transgressive nature of Gothic narratives, it subverts many of the notions central to such novels. As well encouraging emotional responses from readers, novels of sensibility tended to teach people—and particularly women—how to behave and how to express themselves. Todd notes how Richardson’s didactic novels, in particular, went some way to constructing the notion that good and virtuous women were sympathetic, emotional and passive (1986, 110). In The Recess, certain aspects of eighteenth-century sensibility become a source of Gothic horror. Using the Gothic’s focus on ancestry, the past and unwanted legacies, Lee pioneers the Female Gothic by employing the figure of the absent mother as a vehicle to critique eighteenth-century gender politics. The parallels she draws between Mary, Queen of Scots, and her daughters are also of great importance, as I will show shortly. When Mrs Marlow relates to
Matilda and Ellinor the harrowing history of their mother, it emerges that spontaneous, unregulated feelings are the cause of much of her troubles: ‘Fatal delusion of a prejudiced mind! Oh Mary, too tender Princess! Why were not all the past misfortunes of thy life, which had their source in love, monitors to thee?’ (R 28). ‘Why did they not teach thee to avoid this error’, laments Mrs Marlow, ‘which heightened every affliction, and gave new pangs to a long, long captivity’ (R 28). Mary has a fatal flaw in the sense that she is too susceptible to the ‘partial advice of her heart’ (R 28). Unfortunately for Matilda and Ellinor, they are cursed with their mother’s excessive sensibility, which proves as destructive to their own lives as it did to Mary, Queen of Scots.

One of the most notable features of The Recess—and one that makes it such an innovative epistolary novel—is the conflicting accounts of Leicester and Essex offered by Matilda, Ellinor and Lady Pembroke. Matilda and Ellinor are besotted by their respective lovers and idealise them. In Matilda’s memoirs, Leicester is lauded as a ‘guardian angel’ (R 106) and is described, variously, as ‘amiable’ (R 63), ‘beloved’ (R 90) and ‘sainted’ (R 124). Ellinor presents a portrait of Leicester that is ‘diametrically opposite’ to that of her sister’s (R 155). She describes him as ‘chilling’, ‘callous’ and ‘tyrannic in his pursuits’ (R 155–56). Inversely, two very different representations of Ellinor’s lover, Essex, emerge. Ellinor glorifies him as an ‘incomparable’ being ‘calculated to shine in whatever light you examined him’ (R 164). Whilst Matilda largely resists the temptation to criticise her sister’s lover (R 271), Lady Pembroke—the person entrusted to conclude Ellinor’s memoirs—presents him in a very negative light: she describes him as ‘ever haughty and impetuous’, ‘self-deluded’ (R 260) and ‘negligent’ (R 257). The presence of such conflicting representations of historical personages exacerbates the Gothic’s (already) contentious relationship with eighteenth-century, Enlightenment historiography by undermining character analysis as a means of understanding history, and by revealing that readings of the past are not objective (as historians such as Rapin and Hume would have readers believe), but subjective and inherently discordant.17 These broader aspects of Lee’s Gothic representations of the past will be discussed later, but at this stage it is important to recognise that the twin sisters’ fixation with (and idealisation of) their partners is intertwined with Lee’s protracted criticism of eighteenth-century sensibility. Comparing her own impression of Leicester with that of her sister’s, Matilda is confounded by the ‘strange and unaccountable difference’ and reflects on how ‘a woman insensibly adopts the disposition of him to whom she gives her heart’ (R 271). However, despite this observation, Matilda’s conduct does not change. Like her mother, her actions continue to
be dominated by her feelings and her life takes an increasingly destructive path as she remains blind to the biases of her own passions, with tragic consequences. Towards the end of the narrative, Matilda is horrified when she learns that her daughter—who, in yet another parallel to the absent mother, is named Mary—is in love with the Earl of Somerset (R 316). Whilst Henry, Prince of Wales, has been Matilda’s ‘sole object of attention’ (R 283), she neglects to notice that her daughter has been having an affair with a married man, Somerset. Blinded by her own feelings and her attraction to Henry, Matilda fails to protect her daughter, young Mary, who is poisoned by Somerset’s jealous wife (R 316). Having witnessed the death of her daughter, Matilda spends the rest of her days a bitter and lonely woman. Ellinor’s excessive sensibility has similarly tragic consequences. Her feelings for Essex are so intense that when he dies, she lapses into total insanity (R 256).

Cursed with the same excessive emotionalism as their absent mother, Matilda and Ellinor are ‘too tender’ princesses (R 28). Matilda says as much when she describes herself as a ‘sad inheritor of my mother’s misfortunes’ (R 144). ‘[M]ethinks they are all only retraced in me’, she adds (R 144). Listening to the dictates of their hearts at the expense of reason, both girls marry morally questionable and predatory men; ruthless individuals who are arguably more attracted to the twins links to the throne than to the girls themselves. Both girls are so blinded by passion that they fail to recognise the dangers that surround them. Indeed, the target in The Recess is not sensibility per se; rather, it is excessive sensibility that disturbs Lee. The Recess reveals the horrific consequences of women who are encouraged to indulge their feelings and renounce reason. The eighteenth-century cult of sensibility and novels of sentiment written by authors such as Richardson compelled women to yield to their emotions and helped to construct the idea that good women were very emotional and sympathetic. In the nightmare world of The Recess, excessive sensibility renders women more vulnerable than virtuous. In Lee’s Female Gothic novel, heightened sensibility damages women because it is not accompanied by reason.

Commenting more on the 1780s than the 1590s, Lee exposes how sensibility stunts women’s development and prevents them from developing a strong sense of individuality and rationalism. Anticipating Mary Wollstonecraft’s remarks in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), women in Lee’s novel are kept in ‘the night of sensual ignorance’ (1985, 99). To adapt C. J. Barker-Benfield’s words, The Recess presents a horrific example of the ‘solipsism and mindlessness’ that are just a few of the dangerous, self-destructive conditions that exaggerated sensibility can inflict on women’s lives (1992, xxvii). Moreover, by using the figure of the mother, and showing how the same excessive
sensibility is possessed by her daughters, Lee comments on how patriarchy is maintained by the transmission of oppressive values in female behaviour. Matilda’s recognition of the force and bias of her own passions, followed by her repetition of the same behaviour, shows how difficult it is for women to disentangle themselves from exaggerated sensibility’s powerful hold. Focusing on female protagonists, the Female Gothic frequently reveals the frightening and incapacitating effects of an over-cultivated sensibility. Educated in the secluded and remote Recess, the girls have little else to stimulate their lives. The confined Recess functions as an allegory for eighteenth-century women trapped in domesticity, and impoverished by a strict obedience to male imposed doctrines of excessive sensibility. As Ellinor’s and Matilda’s lives show, they are, in consequence, ill-prepared for the world. As this chapter has demonstrated, the metaphor of entombment serves to comment on multiple aspects of women’s lives in The Recess. In this instance, Lee uses it to show how eighteenth-century women are entombed in an excessive sensibility and a slavish adherence to their passions.

“GOTHICISING” THE EPISTOLARY: LEE AND REPRESENTATIONS OF THE PAST

Having now discussed some of the gendered aspects of Lee’s novel, I will move on to a broader consideration of its Gothic elements and, more precisely, the ways in which it furthers the Gothic’s enthralment with the past. The Recess does not only comment on the sentimental novel’s preoccupation with sensibility; indeed, it utilises and imitates its very form. As the previous section has shown, Lee’s novel is composed of conflicting sets of letters written by multiple narrators and, in this sense, represents a rare (possibly unique) variant of the epistolary; a form that became synonymous with the novels of sentiment written by authors such as Mackenzie and, most significantly, Richardson. The Recess has major implications for the eighteenth-century epistolary, and it is beyond the scope of the current chapter to consider all of them here.19 Rather, I will focus on the ways in which Lee utilises this popular eighteenth-century form to intensify and develop the Gothic’s obsession with the haunting nature of history. Throughout the forthcoming discussion, the thoughts of Richardson—arguably the most popular writer of epistolary fiction in the eighteenth century—will be used to elucidate the ways in which Lee appropriates this form for the purposes of the Gothic. Indeed, what makes Richardson useful for discussion here is his propensity for theorising on the nature of the epistolary. He was particularly aware of its potential for mimicry and imitation. In his correspondence, he speaks of his desire for Clarissa (1748–49) to maintain an ‘Air of Genuineness’; for the fictional letters of which it
comprises to be ‘thought genuine’ in so far as they ‘should not prefattically be owned not to be genuine’ (Richardson 1964, 85). He desires his epistolary novel to convey an air of authenticity and to ‘avoid hurting that kind of Historical Faith which Fiction is generally read with, tho’ we know it to be Fiction’ (85). It is this quality of the epistolary, its ability to masquerade as a series of genuine documents and to evoke a certain suspension of disbelief, that Lee exploits. Walpole’s observation that ‘nothing gives so just an idea of an age as genuine letters; nay, history waits for its last seal from them’, is not lost on Lee (1937–83, 15: 73); she uses the epistolary to mimic historical documents and, in the process, led many eighteenth-century readers into believing that the events related were true and historically accurate. Lee “Gothicises” the epistolary by turning its attention away from contemporary events and diverting it towards humanity’s uneasy and disturbing relationship with the past.

*The Recess* is radical in the sense that it employs the epistolary to write about the machinations of the *distant past* and not to record *recent* events. In Richardson’s epistolary novels, the event has usually occurred before it is committed to narrative. *Pamela* (1740–41) serves as a good example here. Even though Pamela often ‘write[s] on, as things happen’ (Richardson 1985, 150), days have sometimes elapsed before she “writes up” events either in letters or in her journal. In all epistolary fiction, there is usually a gap between witnessing an event and then writing about it. However, in contrast to Richardson’s epistolary fiction, many years have often elapsed between the experience of an event and the written response in *The Recess*. Indeed, Lee’s text is essentially composed of memoir-letters; the accounts the reader encounters are recollections of events that occurred quite some time ago. This is particularly the case with Matilda’s memoir-letter; the account that dominates *The Recess*. She recounts events a number of years after they have occurred, when nearly all of the principle figures are long dead and Matilda herself is nearing the end of her life. *The Recess* is a novel very much written in retrospect. Lee “Gothicises” the epistolary form by extending the traditional gap between the *perceiving* and *narrating* self. In contrast to Richardson’s *Pamela*, for example, a significant amount of time has elapsed before the events *experienced* are translated into a *narrative form* in Lee’s novel. By employing first person narration and creating a gulf between the occurrence of a past event and its narrativisation, *The Recess* probes a theme central to future Gothic works: the presence of the past in the human psyche.

By the time Lee writes *The Recess*, the epistolary had long been identified as a literary form particularly adapted for conveying introspection and probing human
psychology. In his 1748 preface to the first edition of Volume 3 of Richardson’s *Clarissa*, William Warburton (Bishop of Gloucester from 1759 and well-known English literary critic) argues that fictional collections of letters present a ‘natural opportunity’ of ‘representing with any grace those lively and delicate impressions which *Things present* are known to make upon the minds of those affected by them’ (1970, 124). The epistolary, he continues, ‘leads us farther into the recesses of the Human Mind, than the colder and more general reflections suited to a continued and more contracted Narrative’ (124). Lee leads us even further into the ‘recesses’ of the human mind; she “Gothicises” the epistolary by focusing on the mind’s disturbing, often uncanny relationship with the past. In Lee’s hands, the Gothic continues to explore aspects of the past beyond historical writing and shows that our relationship with history is far more unsettling and complex than many Enlightenment historians suggest. Matilda and Ellinor not only struggle to write their histories; they have trouble remembering their pasts. Attempting to narrate the circumstances surrounding Leicester’s death, Matilda writes, ‘How, how shall I recall the scene, and preserve recollection enough to point it?’ *(R* 123). As the following examples demonstrate, Matilda’s memoir is pervaded by ambiguity and uncertainty, as she struggles to recollect and write the past: she says that she is ‘Unable to reduce the torrent of my ideas into language’ *(R* 117), ‘To paint our distraction would be a vain attempt’ *(R* 14) and ‘I almost expire under the recollection’ *(R* 311). Such protestations are not uncommon in first person narration and epistolary works. However, *The Recess* is very much concerned with the past and the writing of history, and such remarks reveal epistemological anxieties. Utilising the psychological introspection afforded by the epistolary and adapting it to further the Gothic’s obsession with history, Lee shows how the past is forever present in the human mind, and yet always out of reach and inherently incommunicable. Similarly to her twin sister, Ellinor often finds herself unable to describe the past, saying, ‘Something strangely intervenes between myself and my meaning’ *(R* 185), ‘I am too stupefied now to explain it’ *(R* 185) and ‘who shall paint the feelings of Essex’ *(R* 225).

In contrast to Matilda’s memoirs, however, Ellinor’s representations of the past are excessively disjointed and confused. Indeed, in her memoirs, the past’s hold on the human mind is presented as something capable of great destruction. Gripped by madness—a theme that becomes a staple of future Gothic fiction—her ‘abstracted mind’ inhibits her access to the past, as ‘a thousand distant ideas’ engulf and confuse her writings *(R* 182). ‘[T]he past, the present, and the future, presented only one wild chaos to my mind’, she writes elsewhere *(R* 170). Ellinor’s mind becomes fixated by the past and her deceased
husband, Essex: ‘Good Heavens, while I relate this it appears a mere vision!— Did I really see Essex?—Were my senses really revived by that voice so long forgotten, except when fancy recalled it?’ (R 202). Gripped by insanity, she is unable to differentiate between the past and present: ‘I fear I begin again to wander, for my hand-writing appears to my own eyes that of Essex’, she comments when writing her memoirs (R 196). Essex may be dead, but he lives on in Ellinor’s mind, haunting her reality and dragging her back into the past. Utilising the epistolary for the purposes of Gothic fiction, Lee draws attention to history’s enduring presence in the human mind. By extending the gap between the perceiving and narrating self and utilising the psychological insight afforded by the epistolary, Lee reveals the poisonous effects the past can have on the mind and the horrors of madness and mental decay. Continuing with one of The Recess’s most enduring Gothic metaphors, Ellinor effectively becomes entombed in her own history; her mind becomes imprisoned in a past so traumatic that she can neither write it, nor fully comprehend it. Overwhelmed by her history and the spectre of Essex that haunts her psyche, Ellinor, to her sister’s horror, spends the rest of her days ‘set in insensibility’ (R 270). Positioning the Gothic as eighteenth-century (or Enlightenment) historiography’s other, The Recess reveals humanity’s non-linear relationship with the past and demonstrates that human experience is inherently incongruent with the order and systematisation imposed by historians.

In The Recess, the eighteenth-century epistolary and the Gothic’s obsession with the past are fused together. Collections of letters do not only afford an insight into the power the past holds over the mind; their very presence, form and arrangements have significant implications for how the past is perceived, and representations of it. Intensifying the Gothic’s preoccupation with the nature of history, Lee exposes our troubled, fragmented and enigmatic relationship with the past, challenging the historical confidence and certainty exuded by eighteenth-century historians such as Hume and Rapin. As an epistolary novel consisting of numerous letters, The Recess is perhaps more accurately defined as a collection of documents than as a “manuscript.” Lee’s novel significantly develops the narrative complexity of both Richardson’s epistolary fiction and Reeve’s Gothic novel, The Old English Baron. The structure of Lee’s novel serves to illustrate this point and is important in terms of understanding her Gothic representation of the past. Beginning with life in the Recess and ending with her return to England, the first memoir-letter of The Recess is written by Matilda. Receiving Ellinor’s writings from Lady Arundel, Matilda then attaches her sister’s memoir (R 154). This account is addressed to Matilda and delivered into the hands of Lady Pembroke (R 219), along with the addition of
two letters that are addressed from Ellinor to the latter. Lady Pembroke briefly contributes to the narrative (R 219–20) before the letters themselves appear. It is important to note that these particular documents differ from memoir-letters; they are actual letters that cover a much shorter span of time and are more typical of eighteenth-century epistolary novels. After these letters, Ellinor’s account switches back to a memoir-letter, but this time it is written for Lady Pembroke, not Matilda. Ellinor is rendered insane by her traumatic past and Lady Pembroke concludes her memoir. Having received all of these documents from Lady Arundel, Lady Pembroke’s sister, Matilda then resumes her own memoir-letter, beginning with the confounding differences in the sisters’ accounts of events, to her own impending death.

Indeed, The Recess is essentially an archive; it consists of multiple, interconnecting historical documents. All of the letters are (originally) collated by Matilda and addressed to Adelaide Marie De Montmorenci, the French ambassador’s daughter who only features briefly towards the end of The Recess (R 325). It is because of Adelaide’s tenderness towards her during the early stages of her illness, and her curiosity about her life, that Matilda decides to construct such a narrative in the first place (R 7). As the ‘Advertisement’ to The Recess highlights, Matilda’s collection of documents are eventually discovered hundreds of years later in the eighteenth century and are then edited by Lee. In typical Gothic fashion, Lee is unable to publish the method by which she acquired the original manuscript and explains how, as an editor, she has altered the original language ‘to that of the present age, since the obsolete stile of the author would be frequently unintelligible’ (R 5). Lee wants us to believe that, throughout its turbulent history, the original, multifaceted, manuscript has travelled hundreds of miles, survived several major historical events, been read by numerous personages, stored in a variety of locations and has now, hundreds of years later in the eighteenth century, been translated and published.

Reminiscent of Richardson’s thoughts on the historical suspension of disbelief afforded by the epistolary, readers of The Recess are encouraged to believe that underneath the neat, printed characters lay Matilda’s, Ellinor’s and Lady Pembroke’s handwritten, time-worn manuscripts. In The Recess, letters serve to illuminate the “transmittedness” of the past, its existence in the present and its propensity for resisting synthesis. To use the words of Thomas O. Beebee (1999, 15), as well as their actual content, letters are equally important as signifiers in The Recess. The sprawling, disjointed nature of Lee’s epistolary novel reveals the past for what it is: a disordered mass. Letters act as foils to the sources
Lee most likely consulted in writing *The Recess* (including Hume’s *The History of England* and Robertson’s *History of Scotland*) and negate the conceptualisation and application of ‘unifying themes and plots’ (Day 1966, 8). As Jayne Elizabeth Lewis highlights, *The Recess* is essentially ‘paratactic’, as its different elements are ‘jammed together’ in ways that defy readers attempts to discover ‘logical connections’ amongst them (1995, 169). Lee’s Gothic appropriation of the epistolary form to comment on historiography is compelling, and, at a time when a number of historians were using the epistolary format to write history, her novel reveals a profound insight into the relationship between the letter-writer and the historian.22

Whether it is a person writing a letter to a friend or relative, or a historian attempting to reconstruct historical events, they have one salient factor in common: they are both essentially **writing an absence**. The person who writes a letter is, firstly, writing to a correspondent who is not present at the time of writing (in terms of the *The Recess*, Adelaide) and, secondly, writing about (past) events that the absent person has not witnessed (again, in *The Recess*, the events of Matilda’s life). The historian (for example, Hume) is writing about events that have irretrievably passed. The writing of letters and the writing of history require acts of imagination and the translation of experience into language; both forms of writing ‘bear traces of events as manifest in consciousness’ (Perry 1980, 119). Indeed, *The Recess* reveals that, because both letters and history write absences (events that have not been witnessed directly), they are both prone to misinformation, misrepresentation and confusion. Throughout *The Recess*, letters have a peculiar propensity for complication. Communications frequently break down, defy understanding, or are interrupted. For example, Matilda’s letters to Leicester are intercepted by Williams (*R* 71–72), whilst, in the wake of the death of Henry (the Prince of Wales), she finds herself confused by the cryptic messages that she receives from Sir David Murray (*R* 293–97). After Lord Arlington’s death, Essex sends a letter to Ellinor, hopeful that she will be freed from her virtual imprisonment in his house. However, Essex’s letter is intercepted by watchful relations and he is sent an ambiguous note alluding to Ellinor’s ‘insanity and confinement’ (*R* 211). Relating to the whole ethos of Gothic literature, *The Recess* continually undermines notions of clarity, certainty and precision. Significantly developing the Gothic’s hostility towards Enlightenment historical methodologies designed to master the past, Lee uses letters to reveal how, akin to historiography, they have a penchant for obscuring, deceiving and manipulating as much as they do for ‘informing, clarifying and negotiating’ (Zaczek 1997, 122).
CONCLUSION: THE RECESS, HISTORY AND THE LEGACY OF THE FEMALE GOTHIC

The Recess shows eighteenth-century Gothic at its most historically subversive. Indeed, Lee’s novel provides an example of historiography in reverse: where a historian such as Hume takes an “unknown” past and creates a narrative to transform what is initially strange into something familiar and understandable, Lee takes a “known” past in The Recess, constructs a narrative that emphasises its unfamiliarity and incomprehensibility and, ultimately, exposes its inherent—and profoundly disturbing—“unknowability.” Capturing humanity’s paradoxical relationship with the past, we finish Lee’s suspenseful Gothic novel knowing more about a historical period and yet, at the same time, less. It is a work that manages to bring the reader into closer contact with the past, and yet make that past seem further away by frustrating our access to it, and illuminating the mutability of the historical record. Moreover, The Recess heralds the beginning of the Female Gothic. Rejecting the model of history that lauds “Great Men” and that underpins Reeve’s Loyalist Gothic agenda in The Old English Baron, Lee commandeers established Gothic tropes and exploits the genre’s infatuation with the past in order to show that the men of history are often far from great. Establishing the Female Gothic by focusing on the terrible plight of its female protagonists, The Recess showed future women writers how the genre could be used to critique women’s marginalisation and oppression in history and society.23

Indeed, with its persistent images of imprisonment, tyranny and death, The Recess can be considered not only as the darkest Gothic novel discussed in this thesis, but as one of the bleakest novels of the eighteenth century. In Walpole’s Otranto, an unknown, threatening past destroys the current social order (symbolised by the ruined castle), but an ancestral chain is ultimately restored (as the limb by limb re-membering of Alfonso signifies). In Reeve’s Loyalist Gothic novel, she constructs a Christian past where the virtuous are ultimately saved and rewarded. In stark contrast to these previous Gothic works, patriarchy destroys nearly all of the female protagonists in Lee’s Female Gothic past, and it ends on a note of despair as the ailing Matilda bequeaths a casket containing her history to a friend. There is no benevolent God to assist the virtuous in The Recess. In the hands of its next proponent, the Female Gothic still uses fictional pasts to probe women’s oppression, but it presents a more optimistic vision. The historical specificity that had defined Gothic pasts since Reeve also disappears. If Lee pioneered the Female Gothic by hijacking staple Gothic conventions to probe women’s contemporary and historical plight, it was Ann Radcliffe who continued its legacy and took it to new, hitherto
unforeseen levels of influence and popularity. With the outbreak of the French Revolution in the early 1790s, existing debates surrounding the nature of the past and women’s role in both history and society gathered force. As I will show in the following chapter, the past constructed in Radcliffe’s Female Gothic novel, *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), engages with such contemporary anxieties and debates, as well as probing the rise of a new, unsettling sense of historical consciousness engendered by the monumental events taking place across the English Channel.

Notes

1. *The Recess* comprises of three volumes. The first of these appeared in 1783 with the next two volumes following in 1785. By 1806—twenty years after its original publication—*The Recess* had gone through five separate English editions and had been translated into French, German, Swedish, Spanish, and Portuguese (Alliston 2000, xix).

2. For example, Robert D. Hume argues that *The Recess* is a sentimental-domestic novel transported to a historical setting with Gothic trimmings. ‘If wearing a wool tie makes me a sheep, then *The Recess* is a Gothic novel’, he remarks (1969, 283). Since its publication, Lee’s novel has been variously classified. See April Alliston’s introduction to Lee’s text for more information (2000, ix–xlv).

3. In its representations of the Catholic faith, *The Recess* marks a significant moment for Gothic fiction. In the Gothic imagination, Catholicism had been linked with superstition since Walpole’s claim in the first edition of *Otranto* that the strange story he recounts was translated from a Catholic manuscript. *The Recess* exacerbates the Gothic’s fraught and complex relationship with the Catholic faith. Although the main protagonists of the novel are Catholic, the conventions of this religion are presented in a very negative light. After the death of Lord Leicester, Matilda falls into the hands of Catholic servants in France and is scathing about their faith; she is outraged that they refer to her ‘noble husband’ as ‘an heretic’, ‘an outcast of society’ and a ‘wretch not worthy of interment’ (*R* 125). She accuses them of ‘[p]reposterous blindness’ (*R* 128).

Such sentiments regarding Catholicism have an added significance when we consider the political unrest of Lee’s own age and the recent Gordon Riots. Matilda’s description of Leicester’s funeral ceremony is particularly significant. She describes how nuns decorate ‘his sepulchre with all the pompous insignia of Death’ and questions, bitterly, other aspects of the Catholic faith: ‘Can midnight tapers, suspended black, or waving plumes, relieve those eyes which seek in vain their only object? or gratify a heart writhing under the iron hand of calamity?’ (*R* 128). It is these macabre and chilling ceremonial aspects of the Catholic faith that would prove to be a source of fascination for future Gothic writers. For example, in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796) and Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian* (1797), Catholicism is allied with superstition and is used as a means of evoking fear and terror in its predominantly Protestant readership. Focusing on *The Recess* as a Female Gothic novel concerned with gender politics, further discussion of the novel’s representation of Catholicism is beyond the scope of this chapter. I will return to the Gothic’s concern with the Catholic faith in the next chapter, which discusses Ann Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* (1791).

Stevens goes as far as to say that Hume’s and Robertson’s histories were the ‘main sources for her novel’ (2010, 42) whilst, in Alliston’s edition of *The Recess*, she points out the similarities and differences between Lee’s treatment of certain historical events and Hume’s and Robertson’s descriptions.

Early in 1567, Lord Darnley (Henry Stuart)—Mary’s husband and claimant to the English throne—was killed when the house in which he was residing was blown up by gunpowder. Darnley’s body was discovered at some distance from the scene of the explosion. Reports at the scene suggested that he had been strangled. Beyond the reporting of these circumstances, the historical record is sparse and Darnley’s murder remains one of history’s greatest murder mysteries. The Earl of Bothwell (James Hepburn)—a favourite of Mary’s since the murder of Rizzio—was accused of devising the plan to kill Darnley. It was suspected that Mary herself was not wholly ignorant of the plot. Evidence substantiating this theory came to light later that year when a silver casket containing incriminating letters and sonnets allegedly written by Mary to Bothwell was unearthed. These highly contentious documents became known as the Casket Letters and debates about their authenticity raged amongst eighteenth-century historians. If authentic, they practically prove Mary was complicit in Darnley’s murder. If false, however, they not only severely question the integrity of Mary’s opponents, but reveal how she was unfairly represented as a murderer across Western Europe and unlawfully imprisoned in England. Debate surrounding the authenticity of the Casket Letters has raged for centuries, many arguing that they are forgeries of genuine letters that have been strategically manipulated by Mary’s (predominantly male) enemies. The debate has been ignited for so long mainly because the original documents disappeared around 1584. Throughout the centuries, arguments and theories have been premised on interpretations of the copies and translations made in 1568.

Lee does not reveal the identity of the ‘eminent historian’ she refers to here. Jayne Elizabeth Lewis argues that the historian Lee alludes to is ‘presumably Hume himself’ (1995, 172). Following her father’s death in 1781, Sophia (and her sisters Harriet and Ann Lee) opened a school in Bath for approximately seventy daughters of the gentry. By this time, Hume’s multi-volume work of historiography had become the standard and definitive history of England, and, given the fact that upper and middle class women were encouraged to read history as part of their education (see note below), it is plausible that she was intimate with Hume’s work.

Clery points out that (2004, 41), similarly to Elizabeth’s attempts to defend Protestantism against the forces of Catholicism, late eighteenth-century England had recently been rocked by brutal clashes between Protestants and Catholics in the Gordon Riots. Moreover, she highlights that, in a strong parallel with the late sixteenth century, Lee’s age had (as I discussed in the previous chapter) recently extended its influence abroad by unprecedented proportions, raising questions about England’s role as a world power. Such contemporary colonial anxieties pervade the sixteenth-century past constructed in *The Recess*. A particularly notable example of colonial rebellion occurs during a slave revolt in the West Indies. ‘Inflicted cruelty had hardened their hearts, and the sight of untested luxuries corrupted them’, relates Matilda (*R* 141). Indeed, Lee presents a nightmare vision of colonialism gone astray and where monstrous communities have
emerged. Matilda says as much when, speaking of the mutinous slaves, she notes how their ‘own wants have increased with knowledge of our enjoyments, and what they greatly desire, they have learnt to go any lengths to attain’ (R 141). Empire has obviously been important to the Gothic since Reeve’s Loyalist Gothic work, *The Old English Baron*, but it is in *The Recess* where the Gothic begins to generate terror from the nightmare possibilities of Britain’s colonial expansion. Empire and colonialism would become much more prominent in future Gothic fiction, particularly during the Victorian period. However, returning to the eighteenth century, Britain’s expansion abroad would continue to influence Gothic narratives, particularly in William Beckford’s *Vathek* (1786)—an orientalist tale recounting the exotic horrors experienced by the novel’s chief protagonist, the Caliph, Vathek.

9. For a concise history of how the term has developed since Ellen Moers coined the phrase in 1976, see Diana Wallace’s and Andrew Smith’s introduction to *The Female Gothic: New Directions* (2009, 1–12).

10. From this point onwards in this thesis, the terms “Gothic” and “Female Gothic” will be used interchangeably. The term Gothic will be used to denote aspects that are common to the genre; it will often be used in the context of discussing how Lee adapts the conventions set out by Walpole and Reeve. The term Female Gothic will be used to highlight how Lee (and Ann Radcliffe) use this new strain of fiction differently to previous Gothic authors.

11. Even though eighteenth-century historiography neglects female experience and is underpinned by male paradigms, women were encouraged to read history. For example, in ‘Of the Study of History’, Hume argues that ‘female readers’ should read history instead of romances and other ‘serious compositions, which are usually to be found in their closets’ on the basis that it is far more didactic, ‘amuses the fancy’, ‘improves the understanding’, and ‘strengthens virtue’ (Hume 1854, 528–30). Indeed, the rise of modern historiography, as opposed to the history practiced by the ancients, meant that a classical education was not required to read such works, thus making it particularly accessible to relatively uneducated female audiences. In accordance with Hume, many conduct manuals of the time encouraged women to read historical works as a means of widening their experience. See Looser’s *British Women Writers and the Writing of History, 1670–1820* (2000) for more information on this topic.

12. There are numerous parallels with the Casket Letters throughout *The Recess*; their spectre haunts many episodes of the novel. A particularly notable incident involves Ellinor. Whilst detained by Lord Arlington, Ellinor is summoned to the bedside of a dying servant. This servant reveals how he came into possession of a casket found in the Recess which contained ‘a number of papers and trifles of no value’, a ‘large sum in gold’ and a ‘few jewels’ (R 208). Upon opening it, she finds the gold and jewels and discovers that the papers ‘consisted chiefly of the correspondence between Mrs Marlow and Father Anthony’ (R 209), these letters, in turn, containing ‘ciphers, hair’ and ‘sonnets’ (R 210). The similarities to the Casket Letters are unmistakeable. Whether it is the chest that Anana (the Governor’s black concubine who Matilda meets in Jamaica) bequeaths to Matilda’s daughter, Mary (R 150–51), the ‘incredible and disgraceful’ forged documents that Ellinor is compelled to sign (R 178) or the chest that Matilda leaves Adelaide at the end of the novel (the one which contains all the scripts), *The Recess* plays with the controversy and complex symbolism of the Casket Letters. Indeed, as Stevens notes, Lee frequently transfers doubts about the authenticity of the Casket Letters onto her own invented manuscript (2008, 225).
13. Richardson’s epistolary novels were well known for their dramatic qualities and sense of immediacy. Furthermore, when Walpole refers to drama, he also refers to Shakespeare. The Gothic owes a huge debt to Shakespeare’s plays and his dramatic techniques. This is especially the case with Lee: both of her parents (Anna Sophia and John Lee) were Shakespearean actors and the fusion of history and tragedy within such plays resonates with The Recess. Furthermore, it is also important to point out that The Recess is indebted to the French historical novel and works such as Marie de Lafayette’s La Princesse de Clèves (1678), Antoine François Prévost’s Cleveland (1731–39) and Baculard d’Arnaud’s Varbeck (1774). See Alliston’s introduction to The Recess (2000, xv) and Virtue’s Faults (1996, chapters 2 and 5) for more information on Lee’s indebtedness to Shakespeare and the French historical novel.

14. As Janet Todd notes, even though the terms sentiment and sensibility are often used interchangeably, there is a marked difference between them. Sentiment, she argues, is a ‘moral reflection, a rational opinion usually about the rights and wrongs of human conduct’ and is characterised by ‘generalized reflections’ (1986, 7). A ‘sentiment’, she adds, is ‘also a thought, often an elevated one, influenced by emotion, a combining of heart with head or an emotional impulse leading to an opinion or a principle’ (7). In contrast to this, sensibility is more physically based and denotes an ‘innate sensitiveness or susceptibility revealing itself in a variety of spontaneous activities such as crying, swooning and kneeling’ (7). See Todd’s Sensibility: An Introduction (1986) for more information on the differences between sentiment and sensibility.

15. Mothers are often absent in novels of sentiment and it is likely that Gothic authors adopted and developed this device from such works. See April Alliston’s ‘The Value of a Literary Legacy: Retracing the Transmission of Value through Female Lines’ (1990) for a discussion of The Recess’s representation of the mother in comparison to novels of sentiment.

16. Citing the growing importance of sentiment to eighteenth-century historical writing, Stevens argues that Lee exploits the ‘new interest in sympathetic engagements with the past’ and draws on the emotional responses evoked by novels of sentiment (2010, 42).

17. In the advertisement to The Recess, Lee (similarly to Walpole in Otranto) undermines the ways in which eighteenth-century historians use character analysis as a means of reading the past. ‘As painting can only preserve the most striking characteristics of the form’, writes Lee, ‘history perpetuates only those of the soul; while too often the best and worst actions of princes proceed from partialities and prejudices, which live in their hearts, and are buried with them’ (R 5). As Alliston points out (2000, xvii), such a view radically undermines an assumption central to eighteenth-century historiography: that character is stable and, therefore, that the truth of character can be used to determine the truth of incident. Lee’s conception of character, argues Alliston, ‘emphasizes the forces of emotions like love and jealousy’ and, thus, acts as a foil to eighteenth-century historians who tend to relegate such feelings ‘to the realm of the private, which they exclude from history’ (2000, xvii).

18. The largely male-driven culture of sensibility in the second half of the eighteenth century simultaneously enhanced and restricted women’s cultural development. The attributes praised in an age of sensibility were increasingly being recognised as “feminine:” a capacity to convey feelings, compassion, modesty, self-denial and moral goodness. As Sally Winkle notes, the literature of sensibility ‘gave women a
new sense of gender autonomy’, but also prescribed for the female gender the ‘practice of receptivity rather than creativity, feelings rather than deep reflection or analysis, and unselfishness rather than self-love’ (1989, 79–80). Male writers of sentimental, epistolary fiction such as Richardson essentially function as ventriloquists for women; males assume female voices and write about female experiences, outlining examples of what they perceive as “good” and morally prescriptive attributes of femininity throughout their works. The Recess represents a reaction to such attitudes.

19. In terms of narrative and structure, The Recess rectifies one of the main problems associated with the Richardsonian epistolary. As Henry Fielding satirically highlights in Shamela (1741), it is simply not feasible that Richardson’s narrators can write so much so close to—or even during—events. By extending the gap between the perceiving and narrating self and drawing attention to narrators’ difficulties to recall past events, Lee’s novel is more believable and plausible than many of Richardson’s epistolary novels.

20. The Recess was not Lee’s only epistolary novel. Indeed, her first attempt at prose fiction was The Life of a Lover, a lengthy novel of letters eventually published in 1804.

21. In a similar vein to the initial reception of Walpole’s Otranto, numerous eighteenth-century readers believed The Recess to be an authentic and essentially true historical manuscript. In her introduction to Lee’s novel, Alliston recounts a humorous anecdote involving two ladies and their views regarding Mary, Queen of Scots. Speaking of Mary’s marriage to Norfolk and the existence of her secret twin daughters, one of the ladies informs her friend that ‘it’s very true: I have just been reading an entertaining novel, which is founded entirely upon that fact’ (Alliston 2000, xvii).

22. A particularly notable example of a historian who employed the epistolary to write history was Oliver Goldsmith. Published in 1764, his History of England, in a Series of Letters from a Nobleman to his Son closely follows Hume’s The History of England in terms of content. Jane Austen takes aim at Goldsmith’s history in her historical satire entitled ‘The History of England, by a Partial, Prejudiced and Ignorant Historian’ (1791).

23. The Recess would not be Lee’s last Gothic work. She later collaborated with her sister Harriet to write The Canterbury Tales (1796 onwards): a critically acclaimed work that is pervaded by Gothic themes, such as the relationship between science and the supernatural, and features figures such as the Wandering Jew and the banditti. Throughout her writing career, Lee was a very popular and successful writer and supplemented her income with several dramas, ballads and translations including The Chapter of Accidents (1780), A Hermit’s Tale, Recorded by his own Hand and Found in his Cell (1787) and Almeyda: Queen of Granada (1796).
‘[E]very nerve thrilled with horror’: the French Revolution, the Past and Ann Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* (1791)

The fresh ruins of France, which shock our feelings wherever we can turn our eyes, are not the devastation of civil war; they are the sad but instructive monuments of rash and ignorant counsel in time of profound peace.

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790)

Few persons but those who have lived in it can conceive or comprehend what the memory of the French Revolution was, nor what a visionary world seemed to open upon those who were just entering it. Old things seemed passing away, and nothing was dreamt of but the regeneration of the human race.

Robert Southey to Caroline Bowles (1834)

In the years between the publication of Sophia Lee’s *The Recess* (1783) and Ann Radcliffe’s third Gothic novel, *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), a series of events unprecedented in human history occurred; events that would alter the Gothic and the nature of history forever. ‘All circumstances taken together’, writes Edmund Burke in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1791), ‘the French revolution is the most astonishing that has hitherto happened in the world’ (1986, 92). Following in the wake of the American Revolution (1775–83) and the American Declaration of Independence (1776), the French Revolution began in July 1789 with the fall of the Bastille. The Bastille symbolised social oppression and tyranny and yet, at the same time, it was an icon of historical continuity, order and stability. The storming of this Parisian prison exposed the Revolution’s intention to eradicate the past and its institutions and to start anew. Events occurred at a rapid pace. In a bid to reduce the influence of the Catholic Church and return power to the state, the historic tithe—a land tax dating in France from 1585—was abolished in August 1789. Marking the decline of the *ancien régime* and embodying Enlightenment principles such as individualism and social contract, *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* was published in the same month. Amongst numerous other events and acts of rebellion, thousands of poor women reacted to harsh economic circumstances by descending on Versailles and storming the Royal Palace in October 1789. Within just a few months, the absolute monarchy that had governed for centuries had been overturned and France was transformed from a hierarchical, feudal social order to one embracing new Enlightenment principles of citizenship and inalienable rights.
Separated from events by only the short expanse of the English Channel, Britons were astonished that one of the oldest and most autocratic Governments in Europe had collapsed amidst scenes of widespread violence and anarchy. This was a revolution like no other, constituting rebellion on a national scale and involving nearly all sections of society. France—Britain’s nearest neighbour—was a nation in arms, at war with history and the historically conditioned nature of the state. The final volume of Edward Gibbon’s immensely successful work of Enlightenment historiography, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, was published in 1788 and, for many Britons, the Revolution in France had the potential to become the new, contemporaneous fall of Rome. However, despite this comparison, the events taking place in France were so intense and occurred so rapidly that dominant, eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophical historical theories seemed at a loss to explain them.

With its aspirations for freedom and social equality, the French Revolution promised to mark the climax of the Enlightenment’s belief in progress and reason. Indeed, the early proceedings in France seemingly embodied the values that the Enlightenment and historians influenced by its principles (for example, Hume, Rapin and Robertson) treasured: the pursuit of liberty, free-thinking, self-reliance and the decline of historic, despotic social institutions. Nevertheless, paradoxically, the very historical theories developed by Enlightenment historians seemed powerless to explain France’s radical departure from the tenets of the past. The methodological underpinnings of the histories written by Hume and the other philosophical historians of the Enlightenment were placed under severe stress; sociological histories based on the uniformity of human behaviour, stadial theories premised on gradual change and Whig interpretations of the past adhering to notions of steady progress struggled to account for such a sudden, cataclysmic event. The enormity of the French Revolution and its implications could not be explained or contained by existing Enlightenment historiographical methodologies, frameworks of understanding or rational representational strategies.

**THE PAMPHLET WAR, ROMANCE AND HISTORIOGRAPHY**

Although the influence of the rationalist historians of the Enlightenment was still felt during this turbulent period—and remained essential to the Gothic’s attitude towards history—it was no longer as dominant or even seemed as relevant as it had formerly been. With the Revolution in its infancy in the early 1790s and its as yet unresolved “plot” twisting and turning like that of a Gothic novel, it was proving difficult to historicise or
contextualise this historical phenomenon; that task would dominate the historical agenda after the turn of the century, when the Revolution had run its (eventually bloody) course. Nevertheless, in the extraordinary outpouring of political pamphlets in this decade, pamphleteers scrutinised the past not only as a way of promoting their own political agendas, but as a means of predicting the trajectory of the French Revolution and its implications for British life. Facing such an unprecedented event, it was natural that writers would attempt to draw analogies with “known” and understood historical events. Historical debate migrated from the multi-volume tomes of Enlightenment historiographers to the domain of the political pamphlet (a “rapid response” textual mode).

Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) marks a particularly significant moment for late eighteenth-century historical writing. In this fiery political pamphlet, Burke responds vehemently to Richard Price’s famous address to the Revolution Society in 1789 (a society formed not in honour of the recent uprisings in France and America, but of the earlier English Revolution). Capturing the mood of many dissenters and intellectuals in Britain in the early 1790s, Price sees the recent events in France as a blissful Revolutionary dawn. He perceives the French Revolution as a culmination of Enlightenment philosophy and as the latest phase of Britain’s as yet unfinished Glorious Revolution of 1688 (which I will discuss in more detail later).

Rejecting Price’s support for the Revolution in France and his hope that similar revolutions would spread throughout Europe, Burke launches a vehement defence of the unwritten British constitution and warns of the catastrophic consequences such a sudden break from the past could engender. A notable aspect of Burke’s treatise is his use of “Gothic” and sentimental language. This is particularly the case with his extraordinary description of the Jacobin assault on Marie-Antoinette, the French Queen, with whom Burke was acquainted:

> History will record, that on the morning of the 6th of October 1789, the king and queen of France, after a day of confusion,alarm, dismay, and slaughter, lay down, under the pledged security of public faith, to indulge nature in a few hours of respite, and troubled melancholy repose… A band of cruel ruffians and assassins, reeking with blood, rushed into the chamber of the queen, and pierced with an hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards the bed, from whence this persecuted woman had but just time to fly almost naked, and through the ways unknown to the murderers had escaped to seek refuge at the feet of a king and husband, not secure of his own life for a moment (Burke 1986, 164)

Indeed, history and romance become difficult to distinguish in Burke’s *Reflections*. The queen of France (a symbol of the time-honoured social order) is idealised whilst the revolutionaries (those interested in effecting massive social change) are demonised. As
John Whale notes, Burke’s ‘appeal to chivalry and sentiment was seen by his detractors as turning history into romance, real-life politics into theatre’ (2005, 541). In her rebuttal of Burke’s claims, A Vindication of the Rights of Men (1791), Mary Wollstonecraft says as much when she argues that the Reflections are ‘a mixture of real sensibility and fondly cherished romance’ (2008, 44). In his Rights of Man—the first part of which was published in 1791—Thomas Paine argues that ‘Mr. Burke should recollect that he is writing history, and not Plays; and that his readers will expect truth, and not the spouting rant of high-toned exclamation’ (1985, 49–50). In his view, the Reflections are ‘tragic paintings’, acts of ‘theatrical representation’ (49–50) and not ‘the sober style of history, nor the intention of it’ (61). Where Hume’s, Robertson’s and Gibbon’s histories were primarily interested in applying reason to the past in order to glean timeless lessons about statecraft and chart the growth of reason over time, history at the onset of the French Revolution is more interested in the role of feeling in historical enquiry and concerned with how the past matters to the present. As Mike Goode argues (2009, 7), with the publication of Burke’s treatise, emotions and sensations evoked by the past became increasingly important to historiography. As I will discuss throughout this chapter, the Gothic refracts such resonating changes to the nature of history. Influenced by Burke, Radcliffe is fascinated with how we relate to our pasts and exploits shifting notions of history to evoke suspense and fear.

Indeed, Burke’s Reflections would have a significant impact on history and Gothic fiction in this period. Despite intellectuals such as Price who celebrated the early events taking place in France, Burke’s treatise reveals how the French Revolution remained something simultaneously awe-inspiring, dark and inscrutable for some Britons. As the Gothic novels of Walpole, Reeve and Lee attest to, the unknown is always a source of unease and fear. To some British onlookers, the French Revolution appeared not as a rational occurrence that could be explained by rationality, but as something inherently irrational. Before his political views on the French Revolution had hardened, Burke reveals in a letter to Lord Charlemont in August 1789 that all thoughts at home are ‘suspended’ by ‘astonishment’ at the ‘wonderful Spectacle’ exhibited in France (1958–78, 6: 10). England does not know whether to ‘blame or applaud!’ such occurrences, he writes (10). However, Burke laments that ‘the old Parisian ferocity has broken out in a shocking manner’ and registers his fear of something ‘paradoxical and Mysterious’ at the heart of the Revolution (10). France’s break from history is obscure, inexplicable and deeply troubling for Burke. Despite the conservative bias of the Reflections, the Revolution is
something almost beyond rational comprehension. ‘Every thing seems out of nature in this strange chaos of levity and ferocity’, writes Burke, before going on to describe the Revolution as a ‘monstrous tragic-comic scene’ that evokes ‘alternate contempt and indignation; alternate laughter and tears; alternate scorn and horror’ (1986, 92–93). The French Revolution not only transcends Enlightenment frameworks of understanding; it challenges the very limits of literary representation. In the final decade of the eighteenth century, the great question facing writers was how to represent an event unprecedented in human history and one of such enormity that it resisted representation. In the gulf between the decline of Enlightenment historiography, the emergence of literary Romanticism and the rise of Romantic history after the turn of the century, it was the Gothic with its fascination with the nature of history and emphasis on the irrational that proved particularly well adapted for capturing the complex experiences arising from contemplations of the French Revolution.

REVOLUTION: THE GOTHIC, THE PAST AND THE GREAT ENCHANTRESS

In his insightful Representations of Revolution, Ronald Paulson argues that the Gothic ‘did in fact serve as a metaphor with which some contemporaries in England tried to understand what was happening across the Channel in the 1790s’ (1983, 217). ‘When the Revolution itself came, and as it progressed’, he argues, it was an ‘inability to make out the events on a day-to-day basis, but with the suspicion of personal skulduggery beneath each new changing-hands of property’ and power that ‘made the gothic novel a roughly equivalent narrative form’ (225). In his critical essay, ‘Reflections on the Novel’ (1800), the Marquis de Sade (a former prisoner of the Bastille) is of a similar opinion when he argues that Gothic fiction reflects the ‘revolutionary upheavals experienced throughout the whole of Europe’ (1989, 109). The Gothic became increasingly popular at this time. With the daily transgressions taking place across the Channel, Gothic themes such as mouldering castles, Catholicism, feudalism, fragmented documents and unwanted, returning pasts assumed a new, terrifying significance in this period. As this chapter will highlight, the seemingly remote themes of Gothic romance suddenly had a renewed, frightening resemblance with reality. The Gothic genre may have officially commenced with the publication of Otranto in 1764, but, with the outbreak of the French Revolution, it received a new impetus at the beginning of the turbulent decade of the 1790s.
In the context of the present study, perhaps Paulson’s most important observation regarding the complex (inter)relationship between the French Revolution, the Gothic and the past is the following:

Behind all was a new sense of history, of what could or should happen in history, and what history was in fact about. From being about the kings, it became, in certain ways, about larger groups of subjects and their attempts to come to terms with, or create a new order from, the disorder consequent upon the overthrow of an old established order (1983, 224–25).

Driven from all sections of French society, the French Revolution highlighted that ordinary people—not just kings and queens and eminent political individuals—could effect major social change; it drew attention to the role of individual agency in major historical events. The new French government intended to give power to the people rather than the monarchy. Indeed, Paulson’s observations suggest that the French Revolution triggered the demise of traditional, hierarchical Enlightenment historiographical theory and stimulated new ways of thinking about the past (as Burke’s and Wollstonecraft’s works suggest). In the hands of Radcliffe, the Gothic would play a major role in imaginatively exploring such emergent notions of history and a new sense of historical consciousness brought about by the events in France. Often featuring contested feudal social orders, historiographically repressed groups or individuals and entranced with the nature of historical knowledge, it is not difficult to see how the Gothic became synonymous with the French Revolution in this period. As Paulson highlights, the Gothic and the French Revolution had a number of affinities: both were informed by a zeal for reform and yet, at the same time, opened up the potential for delusions, dangerous and unforeseen contingencies, horrible consequences and disillusionment (225). Spellbound by the collapse of one of the most enduring monarchies in Europe, uncertain what the future held for Britain and its own (unwritten) constitution, puzzled by the daily occurrences taking place across the Channel and awe-struck by an elevated state of historical awareness, the British thirst for tales of terror would become insatiable during the 1790s.

It is during such resonating political and historical ruptures that Ann Radcliffe—one of the greatest proponents of Gothic fiction—would begin her illustrious writing career. Reflecting back on her achievements after the turn of the century, Sir Walter Scott lauded her as the ‘first poetess of Romantic fiction’ (1829, 253) whilst John Keats affectionately referred to her as ‘Mother Radcliffe’ (1895, 286). Despite the enigmatic nature of her life, Radcliffe’s suspense-driven novels were a literary phenomenon and she
became the best-selling author of the 1790s. Writing novels set in distant, wild pasts and employing Gothic tropes such as craggy mountains, orphans, fainting heroines, and the (seemingly) supernatural, she became more widely known as the “Great Enchantress” to her contemporary audience (McIntyre 1920, 49). Utilising the narrative skeleton of the Gothic from Walpole and Lee, Radcliffe’s novels drop the historical “accuracy” of The Recess in favour of vaguer, more ambiguous and Romantic pasts; pasts more akin to Otranto. Throughout her fictions, threatening, sinister pasts continually haunt the present and threaten the well-being of her female protagonists. In contrast to The Recess, Radcliffe’s fictions are not written in the first person. However, as this chapter will show, Radcliffe develops the Female Gothic—a form of Gothic fiction pioneered by Lee in The Recess—by focusing on female experience. Her fictions focus on the plight of the heroine and comment on women’s role in history and society.

Beginning with the publication of The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne in 1789 (a work heavily influenced by Lee’s The Recess) and A Sicilian Romance in 1790, her readership grew steadily. However, her popularity rose sharply in 1791 with the publication of The Romance of the Forest, a Gothic narrative set in seventeenth-century France, but written in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution. Despite this obvious connection between Radcliffe’s text and the events unfolding in France, critics have tended to neglect the significance of the novel’s location. In fact, Gothic criticism has tended to neglect The Romance of the Forest in its entirety. Often perceiving it merely as an early stage in the author’s development, scholars have tended to neglect it and favour readings of The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) and The Italian (1797). However, as critics such as Rictor Norton have pointed out, it received widespread critical acclaim upon its publication and played a significant role in making the Gothic genre appealing to a middle class readership (1999, 82–83). Arguing that the past constructed in The Romance of the Forest represents a complex response to the cultural context of the early 1790s, this chapter seeks to illuminate the importance of Radcliffe’s third Gothic novel in its own right.

Seeking new directions for Radcliffe criticism, the first section of this chapter will examine the ways in which the seventeenth-century past presented in The Romance of the Forest is shaped by contemporary events in France. How important is the French location of the novel, what are the implications of such a setting for the Gothic and what is the significance of the decaying abbey? Following on from this discussion, I will examine the politics of historical representation in The Romance of the Forest. The focus here will be
on two major political pamphlets published prior to Radcliffe’s novel: Burke’s *Reflections* and Wollstonecraft’s response to it in the form of *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. What is particularly significant about these fiery historico-political exchanges is their attitude towards the past, their use of “Gothic” language and their conflicting use of the word “Gothic.” This section will focus on such ideas and assess the extent to which they manifest themselves in the past represented in Radcliffe’s novel. Concurring with David Punter, the forthcoming discussion will argue that, despite the seeming historical remoteness of eighteenth-century Gothic, the past featured in Radcliffe’s Female Gothic novel engages in a ‘very intense, if displaced, engagement with political and social problems’ wrought by the outbreak of the French Revolution (1996, 54). Similarly to Price and Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe was a Radical Dissenter and was raised in Unitarian circles. As I will discuss, she was also familiar with some of Burke’s work. The forthcoming discussion will show how Radcliffe utilises the Female Gothic and manipulates established tropes to subvert Burkean attitudes towards history by challenging the status quo and promoting the rights of women.

Contending that the French Revolution and the political debates that it triggered created a new, frightening sense of historical identity and acted as a catalyst for eighteenth-century meditations on the nature of past, the forthcoming discussion will then move on to the various reflections on the transitory nature of history that pervade *The Romance of the Forest*. How do the recent events in France influence representations of the past in the novel? What does Radcliffe’s use of certain Gothic tropes say about the nature of history and what does the novel reveal about conceptions of historical time towards the end of the eighteenth century? Developing ideas from earlier chapters, I will show how, in Radcliffe’s hands, the Gothic continues to function as the dark underside of Enlightenment historiography, imaginatively exploring some of the more irrational and unsavoury aspects of the past that such historiography purposefully neglects. However, the Revolution in France coincides with a revolution in Gothic fiction; the Gothic as a genre and as an attitude towards the recapture of history also undergoes fundamental alterations during this period. Compared to Walpole and Lee, Radcliffe is less interested in the way history becomes narrativised; she focuses more on the way we relate to the past, how we interact and experience it and how history interconnects with the present. Particular attention will be paid to the manuscript which features in *The Romance of the Forest* and Radcliffe’s increasingly Romantic attitudes towards history.
Forming part of the eighteenth-century Romantic Revival and functioning as a literary mode that focuses on the imaginative, horrific and fearful aspects of the past, a proto-Romantic strain had always been part of the Gothic’s DNA. However, as this chapter will demonstrate, in Radcliffe’s Gothic fictions, this proto-Romantic strand is at its strongest and most identifiable. Throughout this chapter, I will show how *The Romance of the Forest* is suffused with Romantic impulses and describe Radcliffe’s art as proto-Romantic. Differing from Romantic attitudes, Radcliffe (and the Gothic genre itself) prepares the ground for Romanticism by drawing attention to the irrational and the macabre and by placing a new importance on subjectivity and spontaneous feelings.\(^4\) Examining the fragmented script and Adeline’s reaction to reading it, a number of questions will be proposed. What is the significance of this historical artefact, what does it reveal about the nature of historical knowledge at this time and how does Radcliffe’s treatment of this Gothic device differ from that of her predecessors? Discussion will encompass proto-Romantic and aesthetic notions of literary fragmentation and will discuss Radcliffe’s use of the sublime in the culturally chaotic decade of the 1790s. As the forthcoming discussion will highlight, the sublime represents a point of contact between the Gothic and Romanticism and assumed a new significance in this period. At a time when the enormity of the events unfolding in France surpassed rational comprehension, the sublime proved to be particularly well suited for encapsulating emergent, late eighteenth-century (re)conceptions of history and the past. For the present, however, I will begin by examining the ways in which the past in *The Romance of the Forest* is shaped by the emergent French Revolution.

**SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE, 1790s FRANCE**
Set in seventeenth-century Roman Catholic France, Radcliffe’s third Gothic novel follows the plight of its orphan heroine, Adeline, who is mysteriously placed under the protection of Pierre de la Motte; a Frenchman fleeing Paris with his family in order to escape his gambling debts. The newly formed family take refuge in a ruined abbey located in a gloomy forest in south-eastern France and Adeline soon finds herself at the mercy of its proprietor, the malevolent Marquis de Montalt, whose actions eventually compel her to escape. Following Walpole’s and Lee’s lead—and, indeed, her own in *A Sicilian Romance*—Radcliffe attempts to lend her narrative a degree of authenticity and believability by appealing to established sources. At the beginning of the novel, she attempts to draw a distance between the seventeenth century of the novel and her own age
by constructing a fallacious historical framework: ‘Whoever has read Guyot de Pitaval, the most faithful of those writers who record the proceedings in the Parliamentary Courts of Paris, during the seventeenth century, must surely remember the striking story of Pierre de la Motte, and the Marquis Phillipe de Montalt’ (RF 1). However, in typical Gothic fashion, the source pointed to is bogus. As Norton highlights, this is not an allusion to François Gayot de Pitaval’s Causes célèbres et intéressants (1734), but to the English translation of this work by Charlotte Smith, entitled The Romance of Real Life (1787). Smith similarly misspells de Pitaval’s name as ‘Guyot’ (Norton 1999, 83). He goes on to note that de Pitaval’s work contains neither the ‘striking story’ of de la Motte and de Montalt, nor any other story that even remotely resembles the narrative of The Romance of the Forest (83). Furthermore, as Chloe Chard highlights, Radcliffe’s seemingly absurd and comical historical frame also contains a much more ominous, contemporary reference. The name La Motte (as Radcliffe’s character is subsequently known in the novel) was notorious in the seventeen-eighties as a result of the French trial resulting from the “Affair of the Queen’s Necklace:” a historically significant event that contributed to the French populace’s disenchantment with the monarchy and which (amongst other events) culminated in the French Revolution (Chard 1999, 367). Even before Radcliffe’s seventeenth-century set novel begins in earnest, it is haunted by her own contemporary present and recent, disturbing events in France. This is not the only example of Radcliffe’s present colouring representations of the past in The Romance of the Forest. Shortly after they return to Leloncourt, Arnaud La Luc (a clergyman who looks after Adeline when she falls ill) and Monsieur Verneuil (Adeline’s distant kinsman) begin discoursing about ‘the national characters of the French and the English’ (RF 268). La Luc’s views on this subject are of particular interest. Balancing England’s refined laws, writings and manners against high suicide rates, he concludes that ‘wisdom and happiness are incompatible’ (RF 268–69). Turning his attention to England’s ‘neighbours, the French’, La Luc sees their ‘wretched policy’, discourse and occupations as evidence that ‘happiness and folly too often dwell together’ (RF 269). Given that the characters featured in the novel are (supposedly) French, such reflections may seem fairly innocuous. However, it is significant that Radcliffe deems it necessary to add a footnote to La Luc’s remarks concerning the French: ‘[i]t must be remembered that this was said in the seventeenth century’, she writes (RF 269). Furthermore, La Luc’s observation that ‘happiness and folly too often dwell together’ (RF 269) in France is very reminiscent of Burke’s description of the French Revolution as a ‘tragic-comic scene’ that evokes
‘alternate laughter and tears’ (1986, 92–93). By adding a footnote designed to distance her own narrative from the policies currently being pursued in Revolutionary France, Radcliffe in fact draws attention to how the seventeenth-century fictional past of which she writes is shaped by events taking place across the Channel. Indeed, the French location of the novel, the contemporary references that form an integral part of the novel’s historical framework and the allusion to French policies would not have been lost on some of Radcliffe’s contemporary readers. Viewing the revolutionary nation of France with a degree of awe, foreboding and incomprehension, some would have read The Romance of the Forest with an added degree of trepidation. Not only is Radcliffe’s novel shaped by recent events in France, but some readers’ perceptions of the novel would have been coloured by the French Revolution and its radical departure from the past.

The clearest parallel between Radcliffe’s Gothic novel and contemporary events in France involves the abandoned abbey that features so prominently in the early parts of the story. In The Romance of the Forest, the dilapidated abbey is a substitute for the Gothic trope of the mouldering castle:

[La Motte] approached, and perceived the Gothic remains of an abbey… The greater part of the pile appeared to be sinking into ruins, and that which had withstood the ravages of time, shewed the remaining features of the fabric more awful in decay. The lofty battlements thickly enwreathed with ivy, were half demolished, and become the residence of birds of prey. Huge fragments of the eastern tower, which was almost demolished, lay scattered amid the high grass that waved slowly in the breeze… Above the vast and magnificent portal… arose a window of the same order, whose pointed arches still exhibited fragments of stained glass, once the pride of monkish devotion (RF 15)

Similarly to the underground Recess featured in Lee’s Gothic novel, this decaying religious edifice works on multiple symbolic levels. It has long been a staple of Gothic criticism to draw parallels between the Bastille and the mouldering castles and abbeys that are typical of 1790s Gothic fiction. However, in The Romance of the Forest, Radcliffe encourages such an association. Forced to move into a different section of the abbey in order to elude detection, Madame La Motte deplores the ‘dismal’ apartments in which she must now stay (RF 57). However, La Motte reminds her that ‘these cells are also a palace, compared to the Bicêtre, or the Bastille, and to the terrors of farther punishment, which would accompany them’ (RF 57). Occurring just two years before the publication of The Romance of the Forest, the storming of the Bastille was still a fairly recent event and, as a symbol of the Revolution’s might, remained strongly impressed on the British public consciousness. Indeed, by November 1789, this once powerful structure was largely
demolished. Although La Motte utters these words in the seventeenth century of the novel, some readers would undoubtedly have interpreted such a remark through the lens of contemporary developments in France. Furthermore, the context of this association is very important. La Motte makes this comparison with the Bastille amidst the ruins of the mouldering abbey. Even though the Gothic has never strived for realism (historic, literary or otherwise), the Bastille would obviously not have been in ruins in the seventeenth century; it would have been at the height of its oppressive powers. By drawing a parallel between these two now ruined structures, the seventeenth century of Radcliffe’s novel is once again betrayed by allusions to the present. Radcliffe exploits contemporary fears surrounding the Bastille and its fall in order to heighten the suspense and terror of her seventeenth-century narrative.

As I discussed earlier, the abbey’s symbolism in The Romance of the Forest is multifaceted. Not only is it important in terms of its association with the Bastille, but also as a religious symbol. The past is almost always Catholic in eighteenth-century Gothic literature. The manuscript upon which Otranto is supposedly based is discovered in the ‘library of an ancient Catholic family’ and depicts a Catholic Europe gripped by fear and superstition (O5). Even though Lee’s novel is set predominantly in England, the major characters in The Recess are Catholic and the twin heroines are literally entombed in a decaying, Catholic religious edifice for much of their lives. As I have noted throughout this thesis, the Gothic often exploits the insecurities of its Protestant readers and presents Europe as a backward Catholic continent gripped by feudalism. Set in Catholic France, Radcliffe’s The Romance of the Forest would appear to be no different. However, under closer scrutiny, there is something unusual about the Catholic past it presents. In Radcliffe’s novels that are located in Italy—the previous A Sicilian Romance and the later The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) and, of course, The Italian (1797)—Catholicism is presented at the height of its evil powers. The Catholic pasts represented are ones dominated by superstition, tyranny and persecution and the heroines of the respective novels are frequently tyrannised by malicious religious leaders serving in corrupt, Catholic religious institutions.

However, as Chard points out, Catholicism has a rather marginal role in The Romance of the Forest (1999, xiii). When she briefly recounts her personal history, Adeline explains how her ‘father’ placed her in a Catholic convent where she is pressured to take the veil by a malevolent ‘Lady Abbess’ and is condemned to ‘perpetual imprisonment’ of the ‘most dreadful kind’ (RF 36). Although she had to spend ‘several
years of miserable resistance against cruelty and superstition’, she eventually escapes the
‘horrors of monastic life’ by refusing to take the veil (RF 36). In contrast to the novels
mentioned a moment ago, the reader does not witness her experiences at the hands of evil
servants of the Catholic faith; we only learn about such experiences through this brief
summation. The decaying abbey and the sense of ‘monkish devotion’ it inspires has
obvious Catholic connotations (RF 15). However, this is a fading monument to a once
glorious and powerful religious order; apart from creating an obscure and atmospheric
setting for evoking suspense and terror, as a religious institution, this decaying edifice has
no direct influence on the welfare of the protagonists. Adeline is not pursued by a
tyrrannical Catholic leader, but a malevolent Marquis. Readers’ expectations of such
corrupt religious figures are frustrated. Indeed, The Romance of the Forest essentially
presents the reader with a paradox: in a novel that depicts a Catholic past, Catholicism
appears to be history. The question we ask as readers though is, why: why would Radcliffe
forego a staple theme of Gothic fiction in The Romance of the Forest only to bring it back
in her later novels? The key to answering this question lies in the location of Radcliffe’s
novel.

The French location of The Romance of the Forest has been rather neglected by
critics. However, when it comes to understanding the representation of the past within the
novel and, more specifically, the uncharacteristically marginalised role of Catholicism
within this past, the setting is of great significance. The events of 1790s France continue to
manifest themselves in the seventeenth-century past that Radcliffe represents. As I briefly
discussed earlier, the French Revolution waged a war not only on the past, but on the
Catholic institutions that symbolised that past. From the outset, Revolutionary France was
hostile towards Catholicism. As symbols of the ancien régime and the unfair distribution of
wealth and power, mob violence directed against the clergy was common. For example, on
26th June 1789, the Archbishop of Paris was viciously attacked in his carriage by an angry
mob and barely escaped with his life (McManners 1969, 22). Having abolished the historic
tithe in 1789, the Assembly declared that the lands of churchmen now belonged to the
state. Ecclesiastical property was sold in order to ease the national debt and the
secularisation of France had begun. Church properties that could not be sold were
abandoned and left to decay. The passing of The Civil Constitution of the Clergy in 1790
subordinated the Roman Catholic Church in France to the French government and resulted
in the destruction of monastic orders, wiping out of existence ‘all priories and abbeys,
whether regular or in commendam, likewise of either sex’ (Hardman 1999, 115). Taking
vows was banned, religious orders were greatly constricted and, for those concerned, there was nothing to look forward to but a bleak existence in declining institutions (McManners 1969, 34). Within just a few short years, church buildings would be taken over for military use and bells, railings and grilles would be dragged away and melted down for armaments (93). Indeed, as Burke’s epigraph to this chapter intimates, France was becoming peppered with ruined buildings, defunct convents and abandoned monasteries in the early 1790s.

In the seventeenth-century past represented in The Romance of the Forest, the reader encounters an imaginative identification with the early events of the French Revolution. The reduced role of Catholicism within the novel echoes its marginalisation in 1790s France. The decaying, abandoned abbey—the symbol of a once powerful religious order—reflects and foreshadows the French Revolution’s re-distribution and abandonment of ecclesiastical properties. The fact that the abandoned abbey featured in the narrative bears traces of having been modified by more recent proprietors only strengthens such associations (RF 20). Indeed, there is a tension between past and present throughout The Romance of the Forest and this generates fear and suspense in a number of ways. The marginalisation of a malevolent Catholicism in the seventeenth-century past depicted in the novel unnerves readers by frustrating their expectations; in a Gothic novel that features a gloomy, ruined religious edifice, readers would expect evil Catholic servants to threaten the welfare of the protagonists. This would certainly have been the case for readers of Radcliffe’s previous novel, A Sicilian Romance, where the heroine Julia is menaced by a debauched and unfeeling monastic order. With the absence of such figures and such a plot, suspense is generated by keeping readers guessing. While some readers would have drawn connections between the novel and the new French government destroying people, buildings and social frameworks, others would have been reminded of the Revolution’s ruthless commitment to destroying the past and have felt a deep sense of foreboding.

POLITICAL PASTS: HISTORY, ROMANCE AND THE PAMPHLET WAR
The seventeenth-century past depicted in The Romance of the Forest is not only pervaded by references to the state of contemporary France; it is heavily influenced by the political debates in England that were triggered by the French Revolution. Before I discuss this aspect of the past in Radcliffe’s novel, it is necessary to outline such debates. Discussing notions of conservatism and traditionalism, Karl Manheim notes how the emergence of the French Revolution suddenly (and rather disturbingly) made people aware that they had always been living in a world of historic traditions without ever having been conscious of
it; this was simply how they lived their lives and how they perceived the world. However, the revolution in France suddenly lifted them out of this world of unreflected tradition and made them aware of these traditions for the first time (Ankersmit 2005, 326). History and tradition loomed large in the British consciousness during the 1790s, evoking a sense of the uncanny. In the unfamiliar events of the French Revolution—the overthrow of an established, monarchical social order—Britons could see something strangely familiar: vestiges of their own revolutionary past and, more specifically, shadows of the Glorious Revolution of 1688. For example, in *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country*, Price perceives the French Revolution as a continuation of the Glorious Revolution, lauding France’s desire to free itself from the ‘slavish governments’ of the past and calling for a similar reformation of government and ‘increasing light and liberality’ in England (1790, 50). As Maggie Kilgour astutely points out, even though ‘the nature of the past, and its relation to the present, was debated throughout the eighteenth century, it gained new life with the French Revolution’ (1995, 23). Seemingly symbolising the pinnacle of the Enlightenment, the French Revolution posed numerous uncomfortable problems, calling into question the very foundations of established systems of social order. Akin to the experience of reading a Gothic novel, France’s abrupt change from the past and its implications for the British political system were both exhilarating and terrifying.

Vehemently condemning Price’s argument in his *Reflections*, Burke contends that the Glorious Revolution of 1688 was a moderate and cautious settlement rather than the beginning of a revolutionary agenda. For Burke, 1688 was an end rather than a beginning, thus negating any comparisons between Britain and France. In contrast to France’s radical departure from history, the English Revolution aimed to preserve the past, our ‘antient indisputable laws and liberties and that antient constitution of government which is our only security for law and liberty’ (1986, 117). In Burke’s view, France’s abrupt break with the past is unnatural, a ‘perversion of history’ and will only result in catastrophe (250). By breaking so abruptly from history and creating a society based on the rights of men, Burke argues that the French have ‘wrought under-ground a mine that will blow up at one grand explosion all the examples of antiquity, all precedents, charters, and acts of parliament’ (148). Fearing that revolutions similar to the one taking place in France will spread throughout Europe (as Price hoped), Burke launches a vehement conservative defence of the British political system. England’s government is based on evolutionary rather than revolutionary change, on organic development, thus ensuring unbroken succession and continuity of tradition. For Burke, British society is ‘a partnership not only between those
who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born’ (46). Indeed, as numerous commentators have pointed out, the *Reflections* is notable for its use of “Gothic” language and tropes. In a particularly “Gothic” manner, Burke depicts present-day British liberties as irrevocably tied to the past and envisages a Britain that is bound by its ancestors:

> Besides, the people of England well know, that the idea of inheritance furnishes a sure principle of conservation, and a sure principle of transmission… Whatever advantages are obtained by a state proceeding on these maxims are locked fast as in a sort of family settlement; grasped as in a kind of mortmain for ever. By a constitutional policy, working after the pattern of nature, we receive, we hold, we transmit our government and our privileges, in the same manner in which we enjoy and transmit our property and our lives (119–20)

Burke lauds a society that is content to respect its past rather than embrace the future and identifies inheritance as an essential facet of Britain’s stability and prosperity. For Burke, primogeniture—the ‘power of perpetuating property in our families’—is ‘one of the most valuable and interesting circumstances belonging to it, and that which tends the most to the perpetuation of society itself’ (140). His image of Britain’s inheritance being ‘grasped as in a kind of mortmain forever’ is particularly interesting. As Angela Wright highlights, Burke views mortmain—a legal term which literally translates as a ‘dead hand’ and which in the eighteenth century guaranteed entailed inheritances—as a positive force (2007, 61). However, as she points out, his imagery suggests otherwise: ‘mortmain’ embraces Britain in a suffocating grasp (61).

Furthermore, as Burke’s remarks on inheritance exemplify, the political and the familial are closely related in the *Reflections*. This theme runs throughout Burke’s work and is particularly evident in the scene I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the flight of Marie Antoinette. Forced out of her bed by a ‘band of cruel ruffians and assassins, reeking with blood’, the queen flees ‘almost naked’ to seek the protection of her husband, the king (Burke 1986, 164). As Eleanor Ty argues, in his ‘presentation of the political act as a sexual act of violation’, Burke makes an ‘explicit link between the public and the domestic realms’ (1993, 4). The Queen in this scene is depicted as weak and ineffectual; a powerless female (Marie Antoinette) is shown to be entirely dependent upon the active, noble and chivalrous behaviour of a male (her husband). As Tom Furniss points out, Burke contrasts the beauty of the ancien régime, embodied by Marie Antoinette, with the barbarity of the largely female revolutionary mob (2002, 61). The royal family are escorted from Versailles to Paris ‘amidst the horrid yells, and shrilling screams… and all the
unutterable abominations of the furies of hell, in the abused shape of the vilest women’ (Burke 1986, 165). Burke idealises the beautiful and (im)passive behaviour of Marie Antoinette and demonises the active, revolutionary women who seek change. Recalling Reeve’s views in *The Old English Baron*, the perpetuation of a benevolent patriarchy is, for Burke, essential to the stability of the social order. Throughout the *Reflections*, Burke draws a parallel between the traditional patriarchal home and the strength of the nation. As Ty points out, in the *Reflections*, the ‘family becomes a microcosmic state, a basic political unit in its own right’ and reverence to the past, the aristocracy, primogeniture and the patriarchal family are viewed as being essential to the longevity of the state (1993, 5).

For Burke, the willed destruction of these time-honoured social traditions in France has created a monstrous social system that will, in his eyes, only lead to catastrophe. His use of “Gothic” language and imagery is particularly prevalent here. Throughout the *Reflections*, Burke romanticises the aristocracy and demonises the Revolutionaries and lower classes, referring to them as a ‘swinish multitude’ at one point (1986, 173). He idealises the aristocracy in the form of Marie Antoinette and presents the Revolution as something of an anti-romance where heroes fail to save the beautiful, sexually threatened and vulnerable heroine (169–70). The French Revolution is a type of ‘family drama’ for Burke, emphasising the vulnerability and destruction of patriarchal rule and authority by crazed ruffians who intend to create a new society (Ty 1993, 5). Indeed, Burke laments the death of chivalry, a form of benevolent patriarchy that functions as an historic agent of social cohesion by perpetuating traditional gender oppositions (1986, 170). By willingly deviating from such social values, Burke argues that dysfunctional families have been created in France: by perpetuating such “warped” social customs, the state literally devours it own children, he argues (194). The *Reflections* is a warning to political radicals in England who would ‘subvert the aristocratic concepts of paternalism, loyalty, chivalry, and the hereditary principle’ (Ty 1993, 5). As Burke argues elsewhere, the revolutionaries ‘endeavour to subvert those principles of domestic trust and fidelity, which form the discipline of social life’ (1893, 541). Turning away from history, rejecting primogeniture and discarding notions of chivalry, Burke perceives the French Revolution as a rupture of the historical process and views it as an example that must be avoided in Britain at all costs. The preservation of patriarchy—and thus gender inequality—is integral to Burke’s conservative defence of the nation.

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft reacts furiously to Burke’s conservative and patriarchal defence of the state. Employing “Gothic” language and
themes, Wollstonecraft’s treatise is primarily interested in replying to Burke, its aim being ‘to shew you to yourself, stripped of the gorgeous drapery in which you have enwrapped your tyrannic principles’ (Wollstonecraft 2008, 37). Similarly to Paine in his *Rights of Man*, she accuses him of romanticising history and idealising the historical origins of the British constitution in the *Reflections*. Refuting Burke’s stance, she reaffirms the connection between the English and French Revolutions; as Steven Blakemore notes, she continually affixes the adjective “glorious” to her descriptions of French Revolutionary events (1997, 74–75). Wollstonecraft was, like Price, a dissenter and embraced the French Revolution’s break from history, perceiving it as an opportunity to improve the lives of women throughout Europe. In her view, the new constitutional Assembly of France promises a fairer society for all, particularly for women, whereas Burke and his romantic depiction of the British constitution compels one to ‘reverence the rust of antiquity, and term the unnatural customs, which ignorance and mistaken self-interest have consolidated, the sage fruit of experience’ (Wollstonecraft 2008, 8). She refutes Burke’s notion of the French constitution as a ruined castle (1986, 121–22), arguing that it is absurd ‘to repair an ancient castle, built in barbarous ages, of Gothic materials’, or to ‘rebuild old walls’, when a newer, more ‘simple structure’, such as the new constitution in France, can replace the superstition and tyranny of older, monarchic social orders (Wollstonecraft 2008, 41). The British constitution is not a sort of ‘family settlement’ handed down through generations, but a series of customs established by ‘the lawless power of an ambitious individual’, she argues (9). Whilst Burke idealises the aristocracy in the form of Marie Antoinette, Wollstonecraft exposes the ‘polished vices of the rich, their insincerity’ and ‘want of natural affections’ (59). She criticises Burke’s entrenchment in the past and his defence of the unwritten British constitution, the origins of which are, contrary to what the *Reflections* infer, difficult to discern. Burke ignores the plight of the poor and the horrors that a monarchic social order forces upon them. Wollstonecraft accuses him of mourning for the ‘idle tapestry that decorated a gothic pile’, for the ‘empty pageant of a name’, whilst ‘man preys on man’ and ‘slavery’ and sickness consume the poor (60). In Burke’s *Reflections*, “Gothic” signifies anything old or time-honoured; in Wollstonecraft’s rebuttal, it is anything tyrannous and defunct. As Ronald Paulson highlights, in the historico-political debates of Burke and Wollstonecraft, “Gothic” summons up ‘ideas of chivalry and courtesy but also castles, cells, locked rooms, high walls’ and ‘contracted marriages’ (1983, 83).
Wollstonecraft is particularly infuriated by Burke’s defence of primogeniture. In contrast to Burke, who believes that patrimony and its orderly transmission of property is one of the stabilising principles of the British constitution, Wollstonecraft deplores ‘hereditary property’ and ‘hereditary honours’ as forces that prohibit social progress. Inheritance has resulted in man being ‘changed into an artificial monster by the station in which he was born’, she writes (Wollstonecraft 2008, 8). She condemns an unwritten British constitution that privileges birth and family above an individual’s talent and abilities. For Wollstonecraft, primogeniture is not something that should be praised as the bedrock of the British social order, but a tyrannous social custom that has ruined countless lives throughout history and that should be viewed with contempt:

A brutal attachment to children has appeared most conspicuous in parents who have treated them like slaves, and demanded due homage for all the property they transferred to them, during their lives. It has led them to force their children to break the most sacred ties; to do violence to a natural impulse, and run into legal prostitution to increase wealth or shun poverty; and, still worse, the dread of parental malediction has made many weak characters violate truth in the face of Heaven; and, to avoid a father’s angry curse, the most sacred promises have been broken. It appears to be a natural suggestion of reason, that a man should be freed from implicit obedience to parents and private punishments, when he is of an age to be subject to the jurisdiction of the laws of his country; and that the barbarous cruelty of allowing parents to imprison their children, to prevent their contaminating their noble blood by following the dictates of nature when they chose to marry, or for any misdemeanor that does not come under the cognizance of public justice, is one of the most arbitrary violations of liberty (21).

Countering Burke’s macabre representation of Revolutionary France, Wollstonecraft paints a “Gothic” picture of Britain where parents imprison and tyrannise their own children; ‘brutal’, ‘violence’, ‘dread’, ‘curse’, ‘barbarous’ and ‘contaminating’ are just a few of the words that she associates with the ancient custom of primogeniture (21). Paine shares a similar view in The Rights of Man when he argues that the aristocracy never has more than one child: the ‘rest are begotten to be devoured’, he argues (1985, 82). ‘Who can recount all the unnatural crimes which the laudable, interesting desire of perpetuating a name has produced?’, questions Wollstonecraft, before castigating a time-honoured social order that has meant that ‘younger children have been sacrificed to the eldest son; sent into exile, or confined in convents, that they might not encroach on what was called, with shameful falsehood, the family estate’ (2008, 21).

Responding to Burke’s depiction of women and the lower classes as a ‘swinish multitude’ (1986, 173), Wollstonecraft demonises the aristocracy, highlighting the cruelty
and inhumanness caused by the relentless pursuit of property. The historic social custom of primogeniture has had a particularly devastating effect on women’s lives: ‘Girls are sacrificed to family convenience, or else marry to settle themselves in a superior rank, and coquet, without restraint’ (Wollstonecraft 2008, 22). In Wollstonecraft’s view, primogeniture, property and pageantry have created monstrous, dysfunctional families and, by implication, states. For Burke, it is the Revolution and its break from time-honoured social customs that has created demonic families in France. For Wollstonecraft, the horror is not abroad, where, in her eyes, beneficial social reform is taking place, but at home. Similarly to Lee’s attitude in The Recess, Wollstonecraft suggests that it is not active, assertive women that are to be feared, but the passive slaves of sensibility that the British social order has created (24). The current social order deprives women of education and property, forces them to behave in socially acceptable ways and essentially turns them into ‘vain inconsiderable dolls’ (24). In Wollstonecraft’s view, the feudal customs perpetuated by the British constitution continue to blight the present, alienating families, inciting class disharmony and keeping women repressed.

THE ROMANCE OF THE FOREST AND THE POLITICS OF THE PAST

Although we know relatively little about Radcliffe’s life and literary influences, we know for certain that she was familiar with at least one of Burke’s works. In her essay, ‘On the Supernatural in Poetry’ (a text that I will discuss in more detail later), she speaks of his earlier work, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757). In The Mistress of Udolpho, Norton suggests that it was curiosity evoked by the vehement political debates triggered by Price’s sermon and Burke’s Reflections that led Radcliffe to read this earlier treatise (1999, 77). Taking into consideration her background as a Dissenting Unitarian, it is likely that she had knowledge of Price’s sermon and had read (or was at least aware of) Burke’s Reflections. Indeed, Radcliffe’s religious and political orientation is significant. As Norton points out, she emerged from a Unitarian, rather than a conventional Anglican, background and should be considered in the same context as Radical Dissenters such as Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Elizabeth Inchbald, Mary Hays and, perhaps most significantly, Wollstonecraft (xi). Dissenters were opposed to the established Church of England and could not take the oaths necessary to secure offices under the Crown or even to take degrees at English Universities.

Given their exclusion from so many civil rights, it is not surprising that dissenters such as Price and Wollstonecraft were attracted to the events taking place in France in the
early 1790s. The new French constitution promised a more egalitarian society: one liberated from the social division and hierachism of old monarchical governments. As Robert Miles notes, Radcliffe belonged to the dissenting ‘middling classes’: a respectable, non-conformist social group that were hostile to the upper classes, felt themselves to be self-reliant and did not identify their interests with the ‘Establishment’ (1995, 4). She was not a complacent member of the suburban middle classes and, as the forthcoming discussion will reveal, her words ‘conceal a hard edge, one sharpened by the robust, liberal, critical energies of the dissenting “middling classes” to which she belonged’ (4). As a dissenter, Radcliffe was a supporter of the Glorious Revolution and her husband, William, had links with a journal that celebrated the anniversary of the French Revolution. The forthcoming discussion argues that The Romance of the Forest can be read as a complex engagement with Burke’s and Wollstonecraft’s “Gothic” political debates and, in agreement with Norton (1999) and Miles (1995), posits that Radcliffe’s Gothic pasts are more subversive than many critics have traditionally given her credit for.

As the political debates I discussed previously demonstrate, the French Revolution prompted a profound questioning of the status and role of women in society. With the boundary between history and romance more indistinguishable than ever at the end of the eighteenth century, Radcliffe utilises the woman-centrism of the Female Gothic and its emphasis on inheritance to critique Burke’s conservative, patriarchal defence of the state. Focusing on Adeline’s traumatic experiences at the hands of men, the past that Radcliffe writes in The Romance of the Forest engages with Wollstonecraft’s notion of the “Gothic” as anything barbaric and backward. As I will show, at a time when history was particularly relevant to the present, the border between history and reality, the foreign and the domestic, the past and the present is particularly faint in Radcliffe’s Female Gothic novel. Indeed, the past presented in The Romance of the Forest is a manifestation of the historico-political debates triggered by the outbreak of the French Revolution.

Subverting Burke’s Reflections, Radcliffe demonises the aristocracy in the form of the malevolent Marquis de Montalt. Driven by ‘ambition’, ‘the love of pleasure’ and ‘voluptuous inclinations’ (RF 342–43), he terrorises Adeline throughout the novel. He tries to force Adeline to marry him, kidnaps her in an attempt to seduce her, ruthlessly pursues her when she escapes and, at one point, has her imprisoned in the decaying abbey. His sexual advances frustrated, the Marquis later hatches a plan to have Adeline murdered. His justification for this murder is particularly chilling: ‘self-preservation is the great law of nature; when a reptile hurts us, or an animal of prey threatens us, we think no farther, but
endeavour to annihilate it’, he remarks (RF 222). As Nicola Trott argues, the Marquis may readily be seen as a ‘corrupt aristocrat of the ancien régime’ and as a Gothic villain whose intellectual ‘sophistry’ shows the deplorable uses to which ‘philosophy’ may be put (2005, 494). The Marquis also terrorises La Motte. Threatening to hand him into the authorities in Paris, the Marquis intimidates La Motte and makes him complicit in his various diabolical schemes. Furthermore, at the end of the novel, it is revealed that the Marquis is a murderer. This ‘atrocities’ is ‘heightened’ by the fact that he kills one ‘connected with him by the ties of blood, and by the habits of early association’: his own brother and Adeline’s father, the late Henry Montalt (RF 342–43). The actions of the malevolent Marquis and his ‘passion for magnificence and dissipation’ (RF 343) compel readers to reconsider the Burkean ideal of the benevolent patriarch by revealing how such authority figures can in fact become tyrants and abuse their positions.

Influenced by the historico-political debates of the 1790s, the seventeenth-century past depicted in The Romance of the Forest is dominated by an evil aristocrat who has abused his inheritance. Indeed, male abuse of inheritance and the unfair distribution of property is the root of all evil in Radcliffe’s Female Gothic novel. At the end of the novel, we learn that the late Henry Montalt received from his ancestors a ‘patrimony very inadequate to support the splendour of his rank; but he had married the heiress of an illustrious family, whose fortune amply supplied the deficiency of his own’ (RF 343). Although Phillipe (who eventually becomes the malevolent Marquis) married ‘a lady, who, by the death of her brother, inherited considerable estates, of which the Abbey of St. Clair, and the villa on the borders of the forest of Fontangville, were the chief’, he soon finds himself in financial ‘difficulties’ (RF 343). Reminiscent of Walter in The Old English Baron, it is the Marquis’ financial plight and desire for the ‘title of his brother’ that compels him to form the ‘diabolical design of destroying his brother’ (RF 342–43). By chance, Adeline escapes the same fate as her father. Once he realises that Adeline is in fact Henry’s daughter and that, if she should ‘ever obtain knowledge of her birth’, he would lose his property, his title and, indeed, his life, we learn that ‘he did not hesitate to repeat the crime, and would again have stained his soul with human blood’ (RF 344). Writing of a seventeenth-century past dominated by the terrible exploits of an evil aristocrat, Radcliffe’s Female Gothic novel negates the idea that primogeniture is a good thing and problematises the late-eighteenth-century Burkean belief in patriarchal authority (Ty 1993, 21).

Echoing the views of Wollstonecraft (a fellow dissenter), Radcliffe reveals how men are often turned into ‘artificial monster[s]’ by their station and the property they
inherit (Wollstonecraft 2008, 8). In a similar vein to Wollstonecraft (and Lee in *The Recess*), Radcliffe reveals that, far from functioning as a time-honoured social custom that ensures the stability and longevity of the state, inheritance is frequently abused by males, often devastating the lives of females in the process. Until the end of the narrative, Adeline is suffocated in the grasp of her usurped, male-dominated inheritance. Akin to Matilda’s and Ellinor’s trials in *The Recess*, the dead hand of the past continually arrests Adeline’s fight for freedom in the present. Reminiscent of Wollstonecraft’s Gothic vision of Britain, Adeline experiences the ‘unnatural crimes’ that the male ‘desire of perpetuating a name’ produces (Wollstonecraft 2008, 21). At various points in her history, she is sent into exile, confined in a convent and imprisoned in an abbey, all so that she is prevented from encroaching on the ‘family estate’ (Wollstonecraft 2008, 21). Furthermore, in another parallel with Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, inheritance and primogeniture are shown to create alienated, dysfunctional families in *The Romance of the Forest*. The Marquis uses the property he inherited in marriage to aid his sexual advances towards Adeline when his own wife, the Marchioness, is still alive (*RF* 146). La Motte marries his wife on the grounds that her ‘birth was equal, her fortune superior to his’ and drags her into exile with himself as a result of gambling debts accumulated in Paris. We also learn that he ‘seldom consulted his wife till he had determined how to act’ (*RF* 23). However, it is Adeline’s family that suffers the most as a result of male abuse of inheritance. The ancestral crimes committed by the Marquis’s desire to assume his brother’s title and property force her to live as an ‘orphan, subsisting on the bounty of others, without family, with few friends, and pursued by a cruel and powerful enemy’ (*RF* 346). Adeline’s family is destroyed by aristocratic greed and she is left to depend on the chivalry of others or, rather, her own powers of self-reliance, to survive.

Indeed, this brings me to another important aspect of the past in *The Romance of the Forest*: chivalry. As I discussed a moment ago, for Burke, chivalry is a time-honoured European tradition that has, throughout history, safeguarded the state. He identifies chivalry as the glory and security of the British nation and argues that, by exalting the “weaker” sex, the nation grows stronger. Burke’s conception of chivalry is not dissimilar to the one that Reeve presents in *The Old English Baron*; both writers present it as an old, idealised code of civilised behaviour that combines prowess, loyalty and honour. Although there is little historical evidence of the existence or implementation of such a code of behaviour, Burke and Reeve argue that the values it embodies—for example, valour, generosity and gallantry—must be perpetuated in the present in order to ensure
national stability. As I discussed in Chapter 3, Reeve draws upon notions of chivalry and romantic images of armed conflict in order to create a strong and unified sense of national identity at a difficult historical moment. Citing the failure of ordinary men to rescue Marie Antoinette, Burke argues that the ‘age of chivalry is gone’ in France; ‘sophists, oeconomists, and calculators’ have ‘extinguished’ this ancient institution which, Burke argues, will have devastating consequences for French society (1986, 170). Indeed, Burke and Reeve invoke the mythical concept of chivalry as an ancient form of courtly protectionism that maintains national stability by providing valorous codes of male behaviour which, in turn, protects so-called “weak” women. In the past presented in The Romance of the Forest, a somewhat darker view of chivalry is revealed; a view closer to that shared by Wollstonecraft.

Subverting Burke’s conservative defence of the state, a warped sense of chivalry pervades the past in Radcliffe’s Female Gothic novel. Compelled to escape the sexual advances of the malevolent Marquis, Adeline arranges for Peter (La Motte’s servant) to assist her. However, whilst escaping on horseback, she realises that the rider is not Peter, but one of the Marquis’s servants (RF 155). She is consequently taken to a secluded villa where the malevolent Marquis attempts to seduce her (RF 156–58). She is compelled to make her own escape before Theodore (her lover) eventually appears to aid her flight (RF 164–67). However, they are pursued and, accused of violating the king’s orders, Theodore is wounded and Adeline is once again compelled to save herself (RF 176). Recovering from his wound, Theodore is held prisoner and Adeline finds herself once again imprisoned in the ruinous abbey (RF 199). Acts of chivalry are frequently undermined or frustrated in the seventeenth-century past of The Romance of the Forest and the heroine is often compelled to save herself. La Motte’s actions often appear chivalrous, but frequently harm Adeline. Even though he is terrorised by the Marquis, his ‘weak’ and ‘sometimes vicious’ character flaws result in her oppression (RF 2). For example, having inadvertently rescued Adeline from the banditti at the beginning of the narrative, he threatens her with the return of her “father,” encourages her to marry the Marquis, is complicit in her abduction and, for a time, agrees to imprison her in the decaying abbey. Described as someone whose conscience has not been ‘entirely darkened’ by vice, La Motte functions variously as Adeline’s saviour and oppressor (RF 211). Using the past to comment on the present and the political debates triggered by the French Revolution, Radcliffe demonstrates how seemingly chivalrous acts often ensure the domination and oppression of women by men. Chivalry may have flourished in medieval literature, Arthurian legends
and romances such as *The Old English Baron*, but it was notably absent from much medieval warfare. Subverting Burke’s and Reeve’s conception of chivalry, Radcliffe exposes it as a myth that enslaves and harms women. In the past presented in *The Romance of the Forest*, chivalry is portrayed as an anachronistic social mechanism that fails to accord with the increasingly self-reliant and mobile heroine.

The past presented in Radcliffe’s Female Gothic novel is “Gothic” in the Wollstonecraftian sense: it is feudal, backward and oppressive. Far from experiencing a time-honoured and noble political system, Adeline is subject to the horrors of a patriarchal social order where male abuse of inheritance has ruined her family and chivalry is presented as something totally outdated and obsolete. Radcliffe suggests that it is positively harmful for the heroine of the novel to rely on such a “system” to save her and exposes the falsity of Burke’s notion of chivalry as an idealised (and probably non-existent) version of the past that is invoked to criticise the present. The past in *The Romance of the Forest* challenges and subverts Burke’s—and Reeve’s—notation of benevolent patriarchy. Just as it was for Wollstonecraft, the past is a scene of ignorance, superstition and oppression in Radcliffe’s Female Gothic novel. She demonises the time-honoured social customs treasured by Burke (and Reeve in *The Old English Baron*) and rejects the notion that the historic tried and tested British political system cannot be improved upon. As I will discuss in a moment, by the end of the novel, an old, male-dominated and tyrannical social order has given way to a new one that accommodates women’s rights. Miles has examined the social change evident in Radcliffe’s novels and has noted how many of them tend to be set on ‘the “Gothic cusp,” the mid-seventeenth century, where the medieval is on the wane, and the Enlightenment begins to wax’ (1995, 114). *The Romance of the Forest* is no exception. Indeed, set in seventeenth-century France, the historical change effected in *The Romance of the Forest* is analogous with the outbreak of the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century and Radcliffe’s own, dissenting inclination towards social and gender reform in Britain. Featuring the exploits of a dynamic woman, Radcliffe’s Female Gothic novel subverts a notion that Burke’s *Reflections* tried to sustain: the eighteenth-century ideological construction of the passive and docile eighteenth-century woman.

To recall Paulson’s thoughts from earlier, the French Revolution inculcated a new sense of history; one which demoted the roles of kings and noblemen and drew attention to the exploits of lesser known individuals and groups. Events such as the march on Versailles demonstrated that women were playing an active and prevalent role in the
French Revolution. Despite their marginalisation in traditional historiography, and
demonisation in Burke’s *Reflections*, ordinary women were suddenly at the centre of
history and effecting major historical change. The French Revolution presented new
possibilities for women; changes embraced by Wollstonecraft and reflected in Radcliffe’s
fictional pasts. Reminiscent of *The Old English Baron*, the personal is political and vice
versa in *The Romance of the Forest* as Radcliffe uses fictional characters and situations to
comment on politics and society in her own time. Rejecting Burke’s idealisation of the
passive, docile eighteenth-century woman who depends on acts of male chivalry to
survive, Adeline covers a geographically large area, escapes the clutches of male tyranny
on numerous occasions and demonstrates great self-reliance. Whilst *The Romance of the
Forest* does feature terrifying pasts dominated by male oppression, the heroine is not
constrained by excessive sensibility and largely escapes patriarchal tyranny. As a result,
Radcliffe’s Female Gothic novel is far more optimistic about women’s lives than *The
Recess*. Influenced by the 1790s dissenting zeal for reform and the events taking place
across the Channel, Radcliffe places an active and resourceful woman at the centre of her
fictional history and records her journey from male oppression and manipulation to self-
control. Indeed, at the end of the novel, Adeline is ‘transformed to the daughter of an
illustrious house, and the heiress of immense wealth’ (*RF* 346): her ‘rich estates’ are
‘returned to her’ and she is in control of her own financial affairs (*RF* 353). After the death
of the Marquis, she remains ‘some time at Paris to settle her affairs’ and instructs for ‘the
remains of her parent’ to be ‘removed from the Abbey of St. Clair, and deposited in the
vault of his ancestors’ (*RF* 353–54). We learn that Adeline rejects ‘several suitors which
her goodness, beauty, and wealth’ had ‘already attracted’ (*RF* 356) in favour of Theodore:
the ‘lover who deserved, and possessed, her tenderest affection’ (*RF* 355).

The extent to which Radcliffe’s Gothic pasts can be considered conservative or
radical has been fiercely debated over the decades. Some critics point to the fact that
Radcliffe’s novels generally end in marriage as proof that she is a conservative writer who
supports notions of gradual, Burkean change. In this view, it is argued that Radcliffe
criticises patriarchy without seriously challenging it.\(^{13}\) However, as Miles (1995) and
Norton (1999) argue, such a view does not accord with Radcliffe’s dissenting views or, as
this chapter has shown, her subversion of traditional gender politics. Indeed, Radcliffe may
not be as radical as Wollstonecraft, but she is certainly not as conservative as Burke. Akin
to most of Radcliffe’s Female Gothic novels, *The Romance of the Forest* does end in
marriage, but it is not one where the man dominates. Nor is it a forced or contracted
marriage. In this sense, Radcliffe’s novel differs from Walpole’s, Reeve’s and Lee’s fictional Gothic pasts, where males control their wives and their affairs. Wollstonecraft may point out the dangers of marriage and the devastating consequences it can have on women’s lives, but she is not totally against it. In her later *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), she admits that she ‘repsect[s] marriage’ as the ‘the foundation of every social virtue’ and believes that marriage should be an equal partnership between two individuals (1985, 165). Radcliffe’s Female Gothic novel reveals a similar view by showcasing a marriage based on equality. Adeline marries the man she loves, remains in control of her affairs and enjoys with her husband ‘the pure and rational delights of a love refined into the most tender friendship’ (*RF* 362). In comparison to the patriarchal tyranny Adeline suffers in her previous life, a significant alteration in relations between the sexes has occurred by the end of the novel and there is much greater equality between sexes. As Carol Margaret Davison has recently put it, Radcliffe ‘boldly imagines an ideal, Wollstonecraftian world where women and men are equal citizens under the law and women handle their own financial affairs’ (2009, 99). The seventeenth-century past of *The Romance of the Forest* is a product of the dissenting historico-political debates sparked by the outbreak of the French Revolution: an event which triggered a wider eighteenth-century awareness of the sweep of history.

**THE ROMANCE OF THE FOREST, THE GOTHIC AND HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS**

Now that I have examined the ways in which the past in *The Romance of the Forest* engages politically with contemporary events in France, I will turn my attention to how the text encapsulates changing, increasingly Romantic notions of history. *The Romance of the Forest* exploits the diverse emotions evoked by the recent events in France; from excitement and hope, to fear and trepidation. The decaying abbey discussed earlier is important here. Walking through the ruinous abbey—a structure that is associated with the Bastille—La Motte makes a ‘comparison between himself and the gradation of decay’ (*RF* 16). ‘A few years’, he comments, ‘and I shall become like the mortals on whose relics I now gaze, and like them too, I may be the subject of meditation to a succeeding generation, which shall totter but a little while over the object they contemplate, ere they also sink into the dust’ (*RF* 16). La Motte contemplates how he may ‘be standing over the ashes of the dead’ and we learn that his fancy and imagination ‘bore him back to past ages’ (*RF* 15). There are numerous instances of such historical reflections in *The Romance of the Forest.*
During one of her walks with La Luc (after her escape from the abbey), Adeline spots the remains of an old castle, describing it as a ‘monument of faded glory’ (RF 264). Viewing its broken turrets and ‘picturesque beauty’, Adeline discloses to La Motte that it ‘seems… as if we were walking over the ruins of the world, and were the only persons who had survived the wreck’ (RF 265).

Such reflections may not seem that uncommon in the context of Gothic fiction or, indeed, eighteenth-century literature in general. Throughout the eighteenth century, the picturesque, sublime and beautiful nature of ruins and landscapes were a source of fervent debate. The ruin, in particular, was a means of meditating on history and the transitory nature of humanity. Influenced by Burke’s work on the sublime (which I will discuss a little later), Gothic writers such as Lee wrote of vast, gloomy, decaying edifices in order to induce suspense and terror and to emphasise the brevity of human life. However, it is Radcliffe who dwells on mouldering architecture and the nature of history perhaps more than any other eighteenth-century Gothic novelist. The cultural context in which she is writing goes some way to explaining this. With the outbreak of the French Revolution and the fall of the Bastille, the nature of history and ruined edifices assumed a new, disturbing significance. William Hazlitt captures the late eighteenth-century zeitgeist when he speaks of ‘the supposed tottering state of all old structures at the time’ (1845, 145). Set in France and revealing a seventeenth-century past permeated by contemporary references to the French Revolution, The Romance of the Forest reflects a wider cultural awareness of the passage of time and the force of history at the end of the eighteenth century.

As Georg Lukács argues, it was the French Revolution ‘which for the first time made history a mass experience’ and forcibly compelled eighteenth-century Britons to ‘comprehend their own existence as something historically conditioned’ (1969, 20–22). To an age already fascinated with history and antiquity, the French Revolution acted as a catalyst for further scrutiny of not only significant historical events (such as the Glorious Revolution of 1688), but the very nature of history and the past. Major, world-changing historical events were no longer something remote that (educated) readers read about in tomes written by historians such as Hume, Robertson and Gibbon; eighteenth-century Britons were now very much part of the historical process. Historiography no longer seemed the bedrock of knowledge and, with their beliefs in the longevity of historical institutions shaken, some members of the educated classes in Britain viewed the past, the present and the future with a deep sense of unease and foreboding. In The Romance of the Forest, Adeline’s meditations on the mouldering castle and the ‘ruins of the world’
illuminate a renewed recognition of the force of history whilst La Motte’s remarks on the decaying abbey reveal a heightened awareness of historical change. Influenced by the tumultuous context of the French Revolution, its war on the past and the shifting notions of history that it engendered, Radcliffe’s Gothic novel reveals a heightened sense of historical consciousness. La Motte’s remarks, in particular, underscore a renewed and frightening sense of historical identity and reveal a wider, disturbing cultural realisation: that history no longer belonged to the eighteenth-century people. Rather, they belonged to it. With its emphasis on dark, repressed histories, problematised historical transmission, the unrepresentable and fascination with the foreign, the Gothic became a perfect means for scaring people by exploiting and exploring this new, frightening sense of historical awareness. In The Romance of the Forest, Radcliffe exploits the ruined castle and, perhaps more importantly, the gloomy, decaying abbey in order to illuminate the dark and violent forces (physical and spiritual) that drive human history.

It is important to note at this juncture that, whilst Radcliffe’s novel displays distinctive, proto-Romantic attitudes towards the past and an elevated state of historical consciousness, it also conducts a number of its more traditional functions. In The Romance of the Forest, the Gothic continues to prey on Enlightenment histories’ omissions in order to evoke suspense and terror. The decaying abbey in which Adeline, La Motte and his family take refuge and where many of the key sequences of action and suspense take place is surrounded by sinister conjectures and rumours. We learn that ‘strange appearances’ and ‘uncommon noises’ have long been connected with the abbey and that, one night in the past, a stranger was brought to the abbey and confined in one of its apartments (RF 30). Gripped by superstitious fears, residents ceased visiting the spot and the abbey has remained ‘abandoned to decay’ ever since (RF 31). The Gothic remains concerned with marginalised, sinister pasts that return to haunt the present. Indeed, it is in this abandoned, decaying abbey that such rumours gather force. In a secret apartment in the abbey, Adeline discovers an ‘old dagger’ which is ‘spotted and stained with rust’ and a fragile, decaying manuscript:

It was a small roll of paper, tied with a string, and covered with dust. Adeline took it up, and on opening it perceived an handwriting. She attempted to read it, but the part of the manuscript she looked at was so much obliterated, that she found this difficult (RF 116)

Earlier in the narrative, La Motte discovers the ‘remains of a human skeleton’ in a ‘large chest’ located in one of the rooms of the abbey (RF 54–55). In order to avoid scaring Adeline and his wife, he keeps the discovery to himself. Gothic tropes—a mouldering
skeleton, a rusty dagger and a fragmented manuscript—symbolise the irrational and violent aspects of the past. The fact that such historical artefacts are discovered in a French abbey only serves to heighten fear and trepidation. However, it is the discovered manuscript that plays a key role in tying these historical artefacts together and recovering the repressed history of which it writes.

Whereas Walpole and Lee use the Gothic device of the discovered script to frame their narratives, Radcliffe integrates it into the main body of her narrative. By doing so, the manuscript becomes a focal point and comments on the nature of the past. Having initially perused it, Adeline waits until she is alone to read it in full.14 Echoing the rumours circulated by the local community, the script reveals the harrowing experiences of a man who was imprisoned in the abbey and met his death there. However, the reader is only granted access to the manuscript when Adeline finds enough time and seclusion to read it. Throughout the narrative, the reader is granted access to splinters of this repressed history, as in the following example:

[Adeline] was preparing for rest, when she recollected the MS., and was unable to conclude the night without reading it. The first words she could distinguish were the following:

‘Again I return to this poor consolation—again I have been permitted to see another day. It is now midnight! My solitary lamp burns beside me; the time is awful, but to me the silence of noon is as the silence of midnight: a deeper gloom is all in which they differ. The still unvarying hours are numbered only by my sufferings! Great God! when shall I be released!  

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‘But whence this strange confinement? I have never injured him. If death is designed me, why this delay; and for what but death am I brought hither? This abbey—alas!’—Here the MS. was again illegible, and for several pages Adeline could only make out disjointed sentences (RF 139)

In Radcliffe’s hands, the Gothic continues to highlight the textuality of the past and our frustrated access to it in the present. However, Radcliffe employs the decaying manuscript in The Romance of the Forest for an additional purpose. The French setting of the novel and the fact that Adeline discovers this fragmented manuscript in a ruinous French abbey (a structure which La Motte likens to the Bastille) are important factors here. As a Gothic novel that is as much about Radcliffe’s present as it is about the seventeenth century it represents, the splintered manuscript that features in the novel symbolises the chaotic reality and shattered sense of history engendered by the French Revolution. Written by a Frenchman and discovered in a ruined French abbey, the fractured history that the manuscript represents attests to the Revolutionary destruction of the past in France. With
the demolition of the Bastille and the abolition of historic legislation (such as the tithe), the splintered and fractured manuscript featured in The Romance of the Forest reflects not only the broken nature of the past in 1790s France, but the broken sense of history at the end of the eighteenth century. The Gothic continues to react to shifting notions of eighteenth-century historiography. The decaying script illuminates the frightening fragility of history and the force and rapidity of historical change. With Enlightenment philosophical histories losing their explanatory power and appeals to prior historical events proving inconclusive, the past at the end of the eighteenth-century had actually become what the Gothic had always suggested it was: a formless, chaotic mass often driven by irrational forces. Asking questions rather than providing answers, the fractured manuscript that features in The Romance of the Forest reveals a past that challenges rational understanding.

Utilising and adapting the trope of the discovered manuscript, Radcliffe’s Gothic novel continues to exhibit a heightened sense of historical consciousness. This brings me to another important point. Gothic manuscripts are typically centuries old. For example, Otranto is (supposedly) translated from an ‘ancient’ document (O 5), The Old English Baron claims to be based on a ‘manuscript in the old English language’ (OEB 139) and The Recess is (allegedly) transcribed from sixteenth-century documents (R 5). Similarly to these examples, the decaying manuscript that features in The Romance of the Forest certainly has the appearance of an ancient historical artefact. As the above quotations illustrate, discovered along with a rusty dagger in a mouldering, cobwebbed room, the fragile, decaying and ‘almost obliterated’ script would seem to predate the seventeenth-century action by multiple decades, if not centuries (RF 127). However, Radcliffe makes it possible to date the fragmented manuscript with surprising accuracy. Frightened that his whereabouts have been discovered and that he is about to be arrested and taken back to Paris to account for his gambling debts, La Motte hastily (if somewhat wordily) inscribes the following message over the door of the abbey’s tower in order to elude detection: ‘P—L—M— a wretched exile, sought within these walls a refuge from persecution, on the 27th of April 1658, and quitted them on the 12th of July in the same year, in search of a more convenient asylum’ (RF 56). When Adeline discovers the manuscript and begins reading it, we learn that the events of which it relates began on ‘the twelfth of October, in the year 1642’ (RF 128).

If we are to assume that La Motte inscribes a fairly accurate date, then the apparently “ancient,” decaying manuscript is in fact only approximately sixteen years old. Traditionally, Gothic manuscripts have decayed over centuries, but, in Radcliffe’s novel,
the script that Adeline discovers has become almost indecipherable in less than two decades. Indeed, the manuscript featured within *The Romance of the Forest* reflects the accelerated sense of historical time engendered by the French Revolution. As Eelco Runia points out, with the rapid pace of events—the storming of the Bastille, the eradication of thousand-year old traditions in a moment, the desecration of the Church, the attempt to start history anew—the Revolution threw one into a breathtaking ‘rollercoaster of terrifying events’ and challenged Enlightenment, philosophical histories premised on slow, incremental historical change (1999, 144). The mutilated manuscript featured in Radcliffe’s novel underscores the frightening force and rapidity of history and reflects a wider cultural realisation that historical time had gained speed towards the end of the eighteenth century. Preying on readers’ contemporary unease about France’s radical and rapid departure from the past, *The Romance of the Forest* reveals how the present can become the past in a frighteningly short space of time.

ROMANTIC IMPULSES: THE GOTHIC MANUSCRIPT, THE PAST AND THE SUBLIME

The French Revolution triggered new ways of thinking and writing about history and drew attention to the nature of the past in an unprecedented way. Notions of fragmentation and proto-Romantic attitudes towards the past remain important here. As I discussed in the introduction to this chapter, Burke’s *Reflections* heralds a significant moment for eighteenth-century historical writing by attaching greater importance to feelings and emotions. This marks an important development from Enlightenment historical attitudes, where historians such as Hume, Rapin and Robertson enforced an emotional distance between themselves and their subjects. With the publication of the *Reflections*, feeling in history and how one reacts emotionally to historical stimuli became increasingly significant. An integral part of such increasingly Romantic attitudes towards the past involves the sublime.15 As critics such as Paulson (1983, 59) and Kilgour (1995, 32) have pointed out, Burke reworks a number of his aesthetic ideas from his earlier *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* in the *Reflections* (1757).16 Furthermore, elements of Britain’s history are identified as sources of the sublime in his political treatise. For example, as Philip Shaw points out (2006, 66), the time-honoured and inherited British constitution is sublime for Burke because it inspires awe, reverence and respect in its subjects. Indeed, the sublime gained a new significance towards the end of the eighteenth century. As the *Reflections* attest to, numerous British
speculations on France at this time were accompanied by a sense of the sublime. Hearing about the Revolution from the safety of English shores and unsure of the implications of such events for their own society, many Britons experienced a sense of ‘tranquillity tinged with terror’ (Burke 2004, 165). France’s break with history seemed to be shrouded in mystery and obscurity. As a point of contact between the Gothic and Romanticism, Radcliffe was attracted to the sublime and its potential for representing the past. The forthcoming discussion will show how, in The Romance of the Forest, Radcliffe utilises and develops the classic Gothic convention of the discovered manuscript to examine this new, developing Romantic sense of history inculcated by the outbreak of the French Revolution. Before I examine the impact of such ideas on the past constructed in The Romance of the Forest, I will outline Burke’s notions of the sublime.

In Burke’s influential Enquiry, he draws a distinction between the sublime and the beautiful. Their effects are unlike and opposite. Beauty is associated with pleasure, society and the aim of reproduction. The sublime is associated with mingled pain and delight instead of pleasure and is linked to notions of terror, danger and self-preservation:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling (Burke 2004, 86)

It is this concentration on the negative aspect of the sublime that marks a critical difference between Burke and his predecessors and which made his ideas so appealing to writers of Gothic fiction. Perhaps the most influential aspect of the Enquiry, however, is Burke’s aesthetic of obscurity. ‘To make any thing very terrible’, he writes, ‘obscurity seems in general to be necessary’ (102). When something is clear, the full extent of any danger can be assessed; when it is obscure, a sense of dread and danger are evoked. As Nicola Trott highlights (2003, 80), Burke’s obscurity ‘stems from a rejection of (Enlightenment) clarity’ for a darkness that is, to use his own words, ‘more productive of sublime ideas than light’ (Burke 2004, 121). Burke is firm in his conviction that nothing ‘can strike the mind with its greatness… whilst we are able to perceive its bounds’ and shows a preference for suggestion over definition, limitlessness instead of lucidity (106). For Burke, darkness, uncertainty and confusion are ‘sublime to the last degree’ (103).

In her essay, ‘On the Supernatural in Poetry’ (1826), Radcliffe makes numerous remarks on Burke’s notion of the sublime as ‘a sort of tranquillity tinged with terror’ and speaks of the ‘thrill of horror and surprise’ (2000, 168). Interpreting Burkean aesthetics
for her own art, she draws a distinction between terror and horror: they are ‘so far opposite’, she argues, that ‘the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates them’ (168). The ‘great difference between horror and terror’, she continues, lies in the ‘the uncertainty and obscurity’ that ‘accompany the first’ (168). Radcliffe also responds to Burke’s critics by defending his addition of the obscure to discussions of the sublime. She argues that those who believe ‘certainty is more terrible than surmise’ must have ‘very cold imaginations’ (168) and, in agreement with Burke, she argues that things seen ‘in glimpses through obscure shades, the great outlines only appearing’ are far more conducive of terror and the sublime than objects ‘distinctly pictured forth’ (169). Obscurity and indistinctness ‘excite the imagination to complete the rest’ and leave something for the mind to ‘exaggerate’ (169). Such remarks throw an interesting light on Radcliffe’s fictional techniques and the representation of the past in The Romance of the Forest.

Burke’s thoughts on the sublime tend to focus on architecture, poetry, nature, landscape, colours, sounds and smells. As many Gothic scholars have highlighted, Radcliffe’s novels certainly focus on the sublime nature of wild landscapes and vast, mouldering architectural edifices. With the obscure, ruined French abbey and the feelings of awe and terror that it evokes in La Motte featuring so prominently within the narrative, The Romance of the Forest certainly utilises such notions of the Burkean sublime. However, my attention here remains fixed on the Gothic figure of the fragmented manuscript. Indeed, Radcliffe’s third Gothic novel is unique in this sense: it is the only time she elects to splinter a discovered script throughout key sequences of action. By employing this device, she demonstrates that it is not just historic ruins that function as a source of the sublime; the textual nature of the past can evoke sublime sensations too. The Romance of the Forest draws attention to the sublimity of the past.

In a decade rocked by the French Revolution’s destruction of the past and where history was heavily scrutinised, the mutilated manuscript is a cogent reminder that the past is sublime in the Burkean sense that it is obscure, formless, remote and potentially limitless. Radcliffe firmly positions this textual, historical artefact as a source of the sublime. We are told that the ink is ‘almost obliterated in places’ (RF 127), that numerous pages are ‘discoloured’ and that large sections are ‘decayed with damp and totally illegible’ (RF 131). The obscure and disjointed fragments of the script that are interspersed throughout The Romance of the Forest play upon readers’ imaginations by promising or suggesting more than what they are and symbolise the Gothic’s obsession with the
haunting and chilling nature of history. To adapt Sophie Thomas’s remarks on the literary fragment, the disjointed sections of script that pervade *The Romance of the Forest* function as ‘disturbing entities’ (2005, 502). Not only are they figures of disruption and discontinuity, but they serve to remind the reader that the glimpses of the macabre history that they disclose are precisely that: vestiges of a past that can never be recovered or fully experienced. Concurring with Burke, Radcliffe highlights absence as a source of the sublime. The past is sublime because it forces us to contemplate our transience and insignificance in the wider sweep of human history. Such thoughts gained force with the outbreak of the French Revolution. The splintered, historic script compels the reader to reflect on the disturbing relation of ‘the part to the whole, presence to absence, and present to past’ (Thomas 2005, 504). Acting in a similar way to the novel’s decaying abbey, Radcliffe’s fragmented Gothic manuscript is a manifestation of the past locked into the present and provides a rather Romantic and ‘uncanny suspension of time and history’ (502). Influenced by the tumultuous cultural context of the emergent French Revolution, the challenge posed to Enlightenment historical understanding and the increasing importance of emotion in historical enquiry, Radcliffe utilises the Gothic in *The Romance of the Forest* to highlight humankind’s essentially “Gothic” relationship with the past: despite its seeming tangibility in the present, it frequently remains elusive, frustrating our access to it and resisting rationality. To use Burke’s words, the decaying script excites ideas of pain and danger, it is conversant about terrible objects and experiences, and evokes terror. Utilising Burkean notions of the sublime, Radcliffe adds a new impetus and dimension to the Gothic’s fascination with horrible and repressed histories. Obscure, formless, remote and potentially limitless, it is no surprise that so many eighteenth-century Gothic writers chose not only to set their narratives in obscure pasts, but to use narrative devices and structures that draw attention to the nature of the past; it is the perfect place and subject to evoke terror.

**TERROR: HISTORY, ADELINE AND THE SUBLIME**

Not only is the past positioned as a source of the sublime in *The Romance of the Forest*; Adeline is revealed to experience a number of sublime sensations. As I mentioned previously, she experiences a type of delightful terror whilst perusing the macabre history related by the manuscript. On her first, scant perusal of the script, we are told that the ‘few words’ that are legible ‘impressed her with curiosity and terror’ and that numerous circumstances ‘crowded upon her mind’ (*RF* 116). When she is once again alone in her
gloomy apartment, her light slowly ‘expiring in the socket’, we are informed that what Adeline has managed to read has ‘awakened a dreadful interest in the fate of the writer, and called up terrific images to her mind’ (*RF* 129). She frequently shudders and even sheds tears during her late night readings of this unfortunate man’s plight (*RF* 132). The full horror of the macabre history begins to dawn on Adeline. Macabre, fragmented and disjointed, Adeline’s imagination is ‘strongly impressed’ by the events recounted; ‘strange images of fantastic thought’ (*RF* 134) cross her mind and ‘to her distempered sense the suggestions of a bewildered mind appeared with the force of reality’ (*RF* 132). Conforming to Burkean notions of astonishment and terror, we are told that ‘her imagination had filled up the void in the sentences, so as to suggest the evil apprehended’ (*RF* 12). Obscure, formless and offering splintered glimpses of a horrific past, the manuscript leaves Adeline to ‘imagine horrors more terrible than any, perhaps, which certainty could give’ (*RF* 131). We are told that her ‘fancy’ now ‘wandered in the regions of terror’, subduing her ‘reason’ and raising ‘other dreadful ideas’ (*RF* 134).

Adeline’s reaction to the horrific past represented by the manuscript relates closely to another important aspect of the Burkean sublime; one that is essential to Radcliffe’s wider attitude towards the past. Indeed, most commentators agree that the Burkean sublime involves a suspension of reason. ‘Hence arises the great power of the sublime’, proposes Burke, that ‘far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force’ (2004, 101). Akin to reading a Gothic novel, the sublime pre-empts rational analysis and presumes an aesthetic of non-representability. Interpreting Burke’s concept of the sublime, F. R. Ankersmit argues that the sublime is encountered when ‘the epistemological instruments we ordinarily use for making sense of the world suddenly prove themselves to be no longer equal to the task’ (2005, 174). Similarly to Burke’s thoughts on recent events in France in the *Reflections*, Adeline finds herself unable to rationalise or contextualise the enormity of the events related by the manuscript. Adeline’s experience of the manuscript is so horrifying and shattering that “normal” patterns of experience are disrupted; she experiences sensations associated with the sublime because she is confronted with contradictions, oppositions and paradoxes that are utterly unthinkable in terms of prior experiences. Gripped by terror and deprived of reason, she can only speculate that some ‘supernatural power’ lurks behind the manuscript and the macabre history it relates (*RF* 141). Developing the psychological introspection that formed such an important part of Lee’s *The Recess*, Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* focuses increasingly on how the past imprints itself on the mind and illuminates the
creative capacity of the human imagination when it comes to conceiving history. Anticipating Romantic attitudes towards the past, there is an increasing emphasis on the irrational, wild and uncontrollable nature of history and a focus on the terrifying sensory impressions that can be evoked by the past. In contrast to Enlightenment historiography, Radcliffe’s novel focuses precisely on the areas where memories, expectations and certainties do not fit into neat patterns and defy intuitions about what the past is like. It is in these gaps, these menacing, unsettling experiences where the past itself is encountered as uncompromisingly strange, or, in other words, sublime.

Focusing on a violent and irrational past and utilising the Burkean sublime, Radcliffe’s work frequently examines experiences of history beyond language and explores the spontaneous sensations that the past is capable of evoking. At a time when the French Revolution was destabilising Britain’s knowledge of its own past, *The Romance of the Forest* suggests that our relationship with the past is far more fluid and uncertain than the historical writing informed by Enlightenment doctrines suggests. With its emphasis on repressed, fractured histories, the Gothic probes the experience of the past that underlies the language of the historian. In this light, perhaps one of the most important elements of Adeline’s experience of reading the manuscript is her sense that the events described occurred in the very place she is staying:

‘In these very apartments’, said she, ‘this poor sufferer was confined—here he’—Adeline started, and thought she heard a sound; but the stillness of night was undisturbed. ‘In these very chambers’, said she, ‘these lines were written—these lines from which he then derived a comfort in believing that they would hereafter be read by some pitying eye: this time is now come. Your miseries, O injured being! are lamented, where they were endured. *Here*, where you suffered, I weep for your sufferings! (RF 132)

It is important to note that, during this scene, Adeline’s fear is exacerbated by the nightmares she experiences before the discovery of the script (*RF* 108–110) and two new sources of terror: strange whisperings and the presence of a ghostly figure (*RF* 133–34). These factors aside, however, it is Adeline’s reading of the manuscript that triggers a type of sublime historical experience. The ‘wretched writer’ appeals ‘directly to her heart’ and, for a moment, past and present seem to merge: it ‘seemed as if his past sufferings were at this moment present’ (RF 132), writes Adeline. Revealing an increasingly Romantic interest in history, the past is located as a site of trauma in Radcliffe’s Gothic novel, producing a combination of pleasure and pain. At this moment where history seems closer and more tangible than ever before for Adeline, the past is still in fact as irrecoverable and out of reach as it has ever been. Reading this macabre history in the very room where the
horrific events recounted took place, the manuscript creates a disturbing illusion of
closeness in distance. The decaying script evokes an aura of a past that can never be fully
recovered or experienced. In *The Romance of the Forest*, the past (as embodied by the
manuscript) evokes sublime sensations by producing the paradoxical union of feelings of
loss and love, pleasure and pain. Radcliffe’s work is especially interested in the emotional
and psychological reactions that historical artefacts can elicit.

Although the script evokes such sublime sensations and has a prominent role in *The
Romance of the Forest*, the document itself does not solve the novel’s mysteries. As Robert
Miles highlights, Radcliffe’s novel is unusual in the sense that the Gothic device of the
discovered manuscript is essentially incidental to the resolution of the plot; everything that
needs to be known about the macabre history emerges in court independently of Adeline
and the fragmented script (1995, 115). In the court scene that features towards the end of
the novel, we learn not only that the person who wrote the manuscript was murdered in the
ruined abbey, but that this man was in fact Adeline’s father (RF 341). As a result of the
trial, Adeline discovers her true ancestry and obtains the rights of her birth. She gives the
skeleton of her deceased father a proper burial and preserves the ‘MS. that recorded his
sufferings’ with the ‘pious enthusiasm so sacred a relique deserved’ (RF 355). However,
the script remains important in its own right and is significant in terms of Radcliffe’s wider
attitudes towards the past. In the midst of the court scene, Adeline suddenly remembers the
manuscript and the sublime sensations that she experienced whilst reading it in the
decaying abbey. During the various testimonies, she vividly recalls the ‘MS. she had
found, together with the extraordinary circumstances that had attended the discovery’ (RF
341). She grows ‘faint’ and, mirroring her experience in the abbey whilst reading the
manuscript, her nerves are once again ‘thrilled with horror’ (RF 341). The manuscript may
not resolve the plot, but it haunts these legal proceedings and evokes chilling memories for
Adeline. After the trial, we learn that the ‘sufferings of her dead father, such as she had
read them recorded by his own hand, pressed most forcibly to her thoughts’ (RF 346–47).
Indeed, even though Adeline’s history and identity have been discovered, she is
traumatised by the past recounted in the manuscript. ‘The narrative had formerly so much
affected her heart, and interested her imagination’, we are told, ‘that her memory now
faithfully reflected each particular circumstance there disclosed’ (RF 347). Such is the
power of the fragmented script that, whenever she reflects on having ‘been in the very
chamber where her parent had suffered’, the ‘anguish and horror of her mind defied all
control’ (RF 347).
Reminiscent of Burke’s configuration of history in the *Reflections*, there is a tension between feelings about the past and knowledge of it in *The Romance of the Forest*. As I discussed in the Introduction, evoking irrationality and mysticism and yet obsessed with legitimacy and the status quo, the Gothic is a manifestation of pro- and anti-Enlightenment impulses. This is particularly the case with Radcliffe. Even though reason triumphs in *The Romance of the Forest* by dispelling many of the novel’s mysteries and accounting for the identity and fate of the manuscript’s author, Radcliffe continues to probe aspects of the past (and our relationship with it) that are beyond the scope of logic and reason. Whether it is La Motte’s thoughts on the mouldering abbey, Adeline’s reflections on the ruined castle or her reaction to historical artefacts, *The Romance of the Forest* values moods and feelings as much as truth and knowledge. In the late eighteenth century, the former qualities (moods and feelings) were often gendered feminine, and so Radcliffe’s Female Gothic novel can be read as an attempt to inscribe women’s perspectives and experiences into history. The fact that Adeline is shown to experience sensations associated with the sublime is significant in itself.²⁰ Drawing attention to the role of the individual and emotions in historical enquiry, Radcliffe’s Gothic novel conducts a proto-Romantic reconfiguration of history by asserting that how we feel about the past is no less important than what we know about it. Anticipating Romantic attitudes towards history, *The Romance of the Forest* is interested in spontaneous rather than receptive experiences of the past and focuses on what is peculiar and disturbing about history rather than what is common. Writing in an age captivated by the past and a culture experiencing a heightened sense of historical awareness engendered by the French Revolution, *The Romance of the Forest* is more concerned with how the historical past comes into being, how we relate to the past and how it persists in our hearts and minds. Focusing on the more chilling aspects of human history, Radcliffe’s Gothic novel probes the very nature of historical consciousness.

**CONCLUSIONS: THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND PROVIDENCE**

In conclusion, the past constructed in *The Romance of the Forest* represents the most complex reaction to Enlightenment historiographical methods discussed in this thesis. Radcliffe’s vision of social advancement from a tyrannous and feudal social order to a more egalitarian one echoes the work of Enlightenment historians and their theories of social progress.²¹ However, whereas Enlightenment historians such as Hume (and, to a certain extent, Rapin) attempted to purge the past of the unknown by explaining everything
with reason and rigorous methods, Radcliffe aims to restore a sense of mystery and awe to contemplations of the past. Radcliffe does not only position the past as a source of the sublime; her novel suggests that the past is also shaped by divine forces that challenge rational comprehension. In a similar vein to Reeve’s *The Old English Baron*, the notion of a ‘Great Author’ rewarding virtue, punishing vice and shaping important events pervades the past presented in *The Romance of the Forest* (*RF* 265). Adeline often confides in the ‘benevolence of God’, suggests that the ‘uncommon’ circumstances that she has endured are not ‘accidental’ and speculates that she is a divine instrument for the ‘retribution of the guilty’ (*RF* 141). The ending of the novel is reminiscent of Reeve’s didacticism. Radcliffe argues that Adeline’s and Theodore’s ‘former lives afforded an example of trials well endured—and their present, of virtues greatly rewarded’ (*RF* 363). Such a conclusion offers a sharp contrast to the sense of despair that characterises *The Recess*. Radcliffe follows Reeve’s lead in *The Old English Baron* by constructing a past that is ultimately shaped by a benevolent providence and the mysterious ways of God.

It is also important to note that, in contrast to her future novels, Radcliffe had not yet fully developed her technique of the “explained supernatural” and not all the strange occurrences described in the narrative are explained rationally. For example, we never find out who (or what) makes the mysterious noises in Adeline’s chamber (*RF* 134) or what her horrific dreams signify or mean (*RF* 41, 108). Indeed, it is telling that Radcliffe chooses to leave such events unexplained in a novel set in France; a romantic country of seemingly impossible inversions and opposites to late eighteenth-century English eyes. As I will show in the Afterword, the French Revolution continues to have a large impact on Gothic fiction. Placing heroines at the centre of her works, Radcliffe’s Female Gothic novels continue to engage with events in France and the debates triggered by them at home. *The Romance of the Forest* greatly enhanced Radcliffe’s reputation, but the peak of her success—and, moreover, the climax of the Gothic’s popularity—coincided with the increasingly chaotic and violent events of the French Revolution. As I argue in the following chapter, the fact that the Gothic becomes so popular in Britain at this time is no coincidence. The increasingly macabre French Revolution, the debates triggered by it in Britain and the response of the British government would have a profound effect on Gothic pasts and locations of terror.
Notes

1. Despite Enlightenment historical methodology coming under pressure with the outbreak of the French Revolution and the pamphlet war becoming the primary form of historical discussion in England, such philosophical histories remained popular across Europe. Interestingly, Hume’s Stuart volume of The History of England enjoyed spectacular success in France during the Revolutionary years. As Laurence L. Bongie notes (1965, 77–79), the seemingly close parallel between the French Revolution and English revolution caught hold of the conservative imagination in France between 1789 and 1800. The seventeenth-century English revolution provided the only really significant modern European precedent to the French Revolution and counter-Revolutionists in France paid particular attention to Hume’s description of the restoration of the monarchy in England. Indeed, Bongie also suggests that Hume’s conservatism influenced Burke’s politics (171). See Bongie’s David Hume: Prophet of the Counter-Revolution (1965) for more information.

2. Walpole admired Burke’s Reflections. ‘Every page’, he argues, ‘shows how sincerely he is in earnest—a wondrous merit in a political pamphlet—All other party writers act zeal for the public, but it never seems to flow from the heart’ (1937–83, 34: 98). He praises Burke’s representation of Marie Antoinette and recalls the first time he set eyes on the Queen of France. Burke ‘paints her exactly as she appeared to me the first time I saw her’, he argues. ‘She was going after the late king to chapel’, continues Walpole, ‘and shot through the room like an aërial being, all brightness and grace and without seeming to touch earth… Had I had Mr Burke’s powers, I would have described her in his words’ (97–98).

3. With its emphasis on female subjectivity, mouldering ruins, secret passages, strange occurrences and fragmented manuscripts, it is now widely acknowledged that Sophia Lee’s The Recess had a large influence on Radcliffe’s Gothic fiction. As Norton points out, there is evidence to suggest not only that Radcliffe had read The Recess, but that it was one of her favourite novels (1999, 46). Furthermore, despite a degree of uncertainty, it is often assumed that Radcliffe attended the school run by Sophia, Harriet and Ann Lee at Bath and that, as a result, she personally knew the Lee sisters (Norton 1999, 46–47).

4. As this chapter will reveal, in her depictions of the past and nature, Radcliffe’s fictions anticipate Romantic attitudes by promoting the creative power of the imagination, emotional directness and the freedom of individual self-expression. However, despite these inclinations, Radcliffe’s fictions still rely heavily on the “explained supernatural” (rational explanations for seemingly supernatural occurrences) and the ordered rationality of the Enlightenment. In this sense, her fictions cannot be considered as Romantic. In contrast to Radcliffe, Romantic writers such as Wordsworth and Coleridge placed much more emphasis on fragmented subjectivity and the boundlessness of the imagination. Furthermore, despite the strong feelings that contemplations of the past or nature evoke in Radcliffe’s protagonists, there is a separation between subject and object; the individual is in awe (or overawed) by the stimulus. This differs from a Romantic exchange, where there is often a unity between subject and object and an emphasis on personal development and growth through strong emotional experiences. For more information on the complex relationship between the Gothic and Romanticism, see Michael Gamer’s The Gothic and Romanticism (2000).

5. The “Diamond Necklace Affair” or the “Affair of the Queen’s Necklace” rocked both the foundation of the French monarchy and triggered defiance of royal authority. In 1785 Cardinal Louis René
Édouard de Rohan, who was out of favour at the French court, was convinced by his mistress, an adventuress known as the countess de la Motte, that he could regain his position if he acted as an intermediary in securing a valuable diamond necklace for the queen, Marie Antoinette. Rohan ordered the necklace from a Parisian jeweller, who gave it to him and the countess, believing they were the queen’s agents. The necklace was never seen again. It is believed that the countess’s husband took it to London, where it was broken up and sold. When the jeweller failed to receive payment, Rohan and the countess were arrested and charged with fraud. He was exiled to a monastery; she was whipped, branded, and sentenced to life imprisonment but later escaped. Popular revulsion at the scandal, especially the queen’s supposed involvement, helped discredit the monarchy on the eve of the French Revolution. The story and the name La Motte gained notoriety throughout Europe. See Frances Mossiker’s The Queen’s Necklace (1961) for a comprehensive account of the scandal.

6. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the Gordon Riots were still a fairly recent event and evoked memories of religious conflict and social rebellion.

7. Even though Wollstonecraft’s venom targets Burke’s Reflections, she also takes aim at his earlier work, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757). She argues that Burke reworks such ideas in his political treatise and criticises his gendered aesthetics. She deplors his association of littleness and weakness with beauty and women, and strength, awe and terror with the sublime and men (Wollstonecraft 2008, 45–46). Wollstonecraft’s critique has interesting implications for Radcliffe’s The Romance of the Forest, which places an assertive and active female heroine at the centre of the novel’s action.

8. As Miles records in his entry for Ann Radcliffe in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, she was the only child of William Ward and Ann Oates. In 1772 the family moved to Bath, where her father managed a showroom for the firm of Wedgwood and Bentley in the Westgate buildings before moving to the more fashionable Milsom Street in 1774. Thomas Bentley was Radcliffe’s uncle, having married Ann Oates’s sister Hannah in 1754, and played a significant role in her upbringing. After her father’s haberdashery business collapsed at the beginning of the 1770s, Radcliffe appears to have spent long periods with the Bentleys. Bentley was one of the country’s most prominent dissenters, who, as a founder and trustee of the dissenting academy at Warrington, included among his friends and acquaintances Joseph Priestley, Dr John Aikin, and his sister Anna Laetitia (later Mrs Barbauld). As well as being subject to the views of these eminent dissenters, Radcliffe may also have been influenced by Dr John Jebb, the radical Unitarian and distinguished theologian, who, for much of Ann Radcliffe’s childhood, lived nearby in London. For more information on Radcliffe’s childhood and her connections with dissenters, see Miles (2005) and Norton (1999, 26–53).

9. Prior to The Romance of the Forest, perhaps the clearest parallel between Radcliffe’s Gothic pasts and the cultural context of the French Revolution is contained in her previous novel, A Sicilian Romance (1790). In an often quoted passage, Radcliffe describes the period in which her novel is set as a time when the ‘dark clouds of prejudice break away before the sun of science’ (1998, 116–17). Such a passage heralds the enlightenment dawning over feudal, Gothic institutions and echoes the dissenting rhetoric of emancipation surrounding the outbreak of the French Revolution.
10. In 1795 when the French Revolution had turned violent and, due to abrasive government policy to stamp out dangerous foreign radicalism, it was dangerous to talk about such subjects, Radcliffe continues to praise the Glorious Revolution of 1688. She argues that it is ‘impossible to omit any act of veneration to the blessings of this event’ (1795, 389). Such a remark in such a context reveals a strong commitment to dissenting attitudes. Her husband, William Radcliffe, shared these beliefs and had a certain zeal for reform; he wrote for the Gazetteer, a journal with strong republican sympathies and that celebrated the anniversary of the French Revolution.

11. Although Burke is primarily responding to Price’s Discourse, the Reflections is hostile towards dissenters in general. Indeed, Burke argues that religion and politics should never mix. ‘Wholly unacquainted with the world in which they are so fond of meddling, and inexperienced in all its affairs, on which they pronounce with so much confidence’, dissenters such as Price ‘have nothing of politics but the passions they excite’, he argues (1986, 94). In his view, ‘politics and the pulpit are terms that have little agreement’ and no ‘sound ought to be heard in the church but the healing voice of Christian charity’ (94). Such comments throw an interesting light on Radcliffe’s political Gothic pasts. Inverting numerous ideas from the Reflections, the past presented in The Romance of the Forest can be read as a reaction to Burke’s hostility towards dissenters and their involvement in the political debates triggered by the French Revolution.

12. In contrast to Burke’s negative reaction to the French Revolution, Reeve supported it in its early stages. Writing to Joseph Cooper Walker in April 1791, she reveals that she had ‘been reading nothing but Politics for some time past’, including Burke’s Reflections and ‘all the answers to it’ (Reeve 2003a). As Kelly notes (2003, 117), at first she welcomed it as ‘a realization of old Whig principles of constitutional monarchy’. In the same letter to Cooper, Reeve reveals her early political views on the French Revolution: ‘I am a friend to liberty, and the security of property, and the rights of man. I wish well to them & all those who defend them’ (Reeve 2003a). As the French Revolution grew increasingly violent, Reeve’s views changed considerably (see note on Reeve in Afterword).

13. For example, Janet Todd argues that Radcliffe is a staunchly conservative writer who endorses slow change (1989, 255). Jane Spencer plays down the political aspects of Radcliffe’s works: ‘[h]ers are novels of escape, criticizing the status quo of male authority but not ultimately challenging it’, she argues (1986, 207). However, Radcliffe’s fictions reveal fundamental changes in the situations of her heroines (a movement from oppression to a greater degree of freedom in marriage) and it is important to underscore that gender equality is a radical concept at the close of the eighteenth century.

14. Adeline’s encounter with the manuscript comments on the process of reading and offers clues about how to read a Gothic novel (for example, alone and by candlelight). Miles draws on this metafictional aspect of the novel when he argues that the manuscript’s significance is ‘metonymic: it stands for ―romance,‖ for writing by women, for the secretive process whereby women romancers produce their ambiguous, multivalent texts’ (1995, 115).

15. From William Wordsworth to Samuel Taylor Coleridge to Sir Walter Scott, Romantic writers deplored the British thirst for tales of terror and positioned Romanticism as a stark contrast to lowly, vulgar Gothic fiction. Even though the Romantics were keen to distance themselves from the Gothic’s more sensational aspects, they would utilise a number of its tropes and develop its use of the sublime (this is
particularly the case with Coleridge and Keats). Despite her harsh treatment at the hands of Romantic writers, Radcliffe loomed particularly large in the Romantic imagination with her sublime representations of nature and the past. Indeed, in their attitudes towards history, the sublime certainly represents a site of exchange between the Gothic and Romanticism. For a thorough discussion of this complex literary relationship, see Gamer’s *Gothic and Romanticism* (2000).

16. As the above note explains, Wollstonecraft recognises elements of Burke’s *Enquiry* at work in the *Reflections*. However, a number of Gothic critics have identified further instances of this. Paulson (1983, 57–73) cites a number of such examples at work in the *Reflections* and, developing such ideas, Kilgour argues that Burke’s representation of the French Revolution becomes a ‘monstrous realisation of the elements associated with the sublime – mystery, a loss of boundaries, and confusion of differences’ (1995, 32).

17. This essay originally formed part of Radcliffe’s final work of fiction, *Gaston de Blondeville*, a historical novel that was published posthumously in 1826. Functioning as a framing prologue, it features two contemporary travellers on their way by horseback to Kenilworth who reveal diverse views on literature and imagination. It was first published separately by the *New Monthly Magazine* as an independent essay in aesthetic theory in January 1926.

18. Radcliffe would not choose to splinter large sections of a decaying manuscript through any of her future novels. Perhaps the closest she comes to reusing such a device is in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) where, after her father’s death, Emily is instructed to burn his secret letters. However, Emily accidentally and illicitly catches a glimpse of one of these manuscripts and, similarly to Adeline, is led to speculate wildly about the past (Radcliffe 2001, 99–100). Akin to the manuscript in *The Romance of the Forest*, the absent letter in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* seeks to highlight the sublimity of the past and reveals proto-Romantic attitudes towards the recapture of history.

19. Immanuel Kant would develop this aspect of the Burkean sublime. He was particularly interested in how unbounded objects evoke sublime sensations and how they transcend the limits of reason. See Philip Shaw’s *The Sublime* for further discussion of such notions (2008, 72–90). Kant’s ideas were becoming increasingly influential in England towards the end of the eighteenth century. However, knowing so little about Radcliffe’s life and literary influences, it is difficult to assess the extent to which such ideas shaped her art.

20. As Shaw notes, by associating the beautiful with women and the sublime with men, Burke’s *Enquiry* suggests that women are unfit subjects for the trials of the sublime; it implies they are too ‘sensual to overcome the bonds of nature, too weak to sustain visionary flight’ (2006, 106). At various points in *The Romance of the Forest*, Adeline engages in the sustained visionary flight associated with the sublime (*RF* 132–33) and, in this sense, her novel can be read as a complex reaction to Burke’s gendered aesthetics.

21. Robert Mighall explores such aspects of Radcliffe’s pasts in his *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction* (1999). He draws parallels between eighteenth-century Whig interpretations of history and the conflicts between reactionaries and progressives in a number of Radcliffe’s works (6–7). Mighall also examines the impact of travel writing on Radcliffe’s Gothic pasts (21–26).
Afterword: The French Revolution and Gothic Historical Settings

‘Thank God’, exclaims the Englishman, ‘we have no Bastille! Thank God, with us no man can be punished without a crime!’ Unthinking wretch! Is that a country of liberty, where thousands languish in dungeons and fetters? Go, go ignorant fool! and visit the scenes of our prisons! Witness their unwholesomeness, their filth, the tyranny of their governors, the misery of their inmates! After that, show me the man shameless enough to triumph, and say, England has no Bastille! Is there any charge so frivolous upon which men are not consigned to those detested abodes? Is there any villainy that is not practised by justices and prosecutors?

William Godwin, *Things as They Are; or the Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794)

Marriage had bastilled me for life.

Mary Wollstonecraft, *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* (1798)

In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Edmund Burke argued that France’s sudden break with the past could only lead to catastrophe and bloodshed. As the Revolution became increasingly violent, his conjectures turned out to be prophetic. In 1792, the September Massacres left over one thousand dead and in January 1793, Louis XVI—the King of France and living embodiment of one of the most enduring monarchies in Europe—was executed. The Queen of France, Marie-Antoinette, was guillotined in October of the same year. Symbolising the French Revolution’s desire to erase the past, a new calendar beginning with Year One—the creation of the Republic—was established in 1793. By the end of 1793, France was at war with Britain and most of Europe, Robespierre was in charge of the Revolutionary government, and the “Reign of Terror” was firmly under way. In a savage period of French politics, estimates suggest that at least sixteen thousand people perished between 1793 and 1794. In 1790, writers such as Richard Price and Thomas Paine heralded the Revolution as a triumphant revolutionary dawn; by 1795, it had descended into chaos, violence and bloodshed. During this period, the Gothic continued to exhibit a heightened sense of historical consciousness and respond to the events occurring in France. As this Afterword explains, the worsening situation in France and the subsequent debates and sense of alarm it triggered in Britain had significant implications for Gothic representations of the past. As one would expect, Gothic responses to such events were very diverse. However, despite its variety, the demand for Gothic novels surged as the French Revolution became more violent. The enormous success of Ann Radcliffe’s next novel played a major role in the genre’s increasing popularity.
Published three years after *The Romance of the Forest*, Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) became the most popular novel of her time and secured her lasting fame. Similarly to her previous work, the past constructed in Radcliffe’s next Female Gothic novel is intertwined with its own historical context. As Ronald Paulson argues, even though the Gothic genre originates from 1764, by ‘the time *The Mysteries of Udolpho* appeared (1794), the castle, prison, tyrant, and sensitive young girl could no longer be presented naively; they had all been familiarised and sophisticated by events in France’ (1983, 221). Reminiscent of Marie Antoinette’s flight from persecution, Emily (the novel’s heroine), is menaced by the malevolent Montoni (the novel’s Gothic villain) and compelled to escape from his tyrannical rule. Preserving the spirit of the Female Gothic, Radcliffe constructs a fictional past to draw attention to the plight of women in the eighteenth century; a subject that was brought into focus in England by the French Revolution. In a similar vein to her previous novels, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is set on “the Gothic cusp:” a seventeenth-century transitional historical setting that draws inevitable parallels with the French Revolution by featuring the overlap of new and old social orders. Furthermore, the description of the castle of Udolpho bears resemblances to the Bastille. Emily describes the ‘terrific images’ awakened in her mind at the sight of its ‘gothic greatness’ and ‘mouldering walls’. Shortly after this, she likens it to a ‘prison’ (Radcliffe 2001, 216–17). Indeed, for some readers, Radcliffe’s Female Gothic novel would have been influenced by recent events in France.

The phenomenal success of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* triggered a wave of imitations. Indeed, the literary marketplace became flooded with Gothic tales and stories. Furthermore, Radcliffe’s novel gave rise to one of the most notorious works of Gothic fiction: Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796). As the French Revolution became increasingly gruesome, there was a notion during the 1790s that Gothic writers tried to compete with the horror conjured by such events. For example, the Marquis de Sade suggests that Gothic writers of the day had to ‘call upon the aid of hell itself’ (1989, 109) in order to rival the terror and horror of such gruesome events, while Walpole argues that, with France choosing to ‘avow atheism, profess assassination, and practise massacres on massacres for four years’, it ‘remained for the enlightened eighteenth century to baffle language and invent horrors that can be found in no vocabulary’ (1937–83, 34: 177). This is certainly the case with Lewis’s novel. Influenced by the German school of horror and the *Schauerroman*, Lewis was a resident in Paris in 1791 and witnessed numerous Revolutionary events. *The Monk* may be set in a vague historical period and located in
Roman Catholic Spain, but it bears numerous parallels to the social and political turmoil that engulfed France and Europe in the 1790s. The destruction of the tyrannical Prioress of St Clare and her convent by a mob has been frequently discussed as a clear parallel to the events of the French Revolution. Lewis tells us that the ‘rioters heeded nothing but the gratification of their barbarous vengeance’. The mob murders the prioress and then ‘exercised their impotent rage upon her lifeless body’: they ‘beat it, trod upon it, and ill-used it, till it became no more than a mass of flesh, unsightly, shapeless, and disgusting’, writes Lewis. The rioters later attack the convent of St Clare and resolve to ‘sacrifice all the nuns of that order to their rage, and not leave one stone of the building upon another’ (Lewis 1998, 306–7). This scene has been compared to the storming of the Bastille and described as ‘an echo of the French September Massacres’ of 1792 (Parreaux 1960, 132).

Allied with a host of other obscene and horrific images presented in The Monk, such scenes raised fears of foreign disorder and anarchy to anxious English readers, while at the same time being titillating and safely distanced.

While Radcliffe’s and Lewis’s Gothic pasts were influenced (either deliberately or by association) with the French Revolution, a very different Gothic response to such events was occurring. The Gothic continued to be a diverse and conflicted genre in the 1790s. In Chapter 3, I discussed Watt’s notion that Reeve’s The Old English Baron could be read as a prototype of the Loyalist Gothic. This strain of Gothic fiction, which favours English medieval settings and which interprets the “Gothic” as indicative of anything time-honoured and to be treasured rather than barbaric and defunct, became very popular during the French Revolution, particularly when France had declared war on Britain. Notable, but frequently neglected, examples of such works include Richard Warner’s Netley Abbey: A Gothic Story (1795), John Bird’s The Castle of Haradyne, A Romance (1795), T. J. Horsley Curties’s Ethelwina, or the House of Fitz-Auburne. A Romance of Former Times (1799) and two works penned by anonymous authors: Mort Castle (1798) and ‘Kilverstone Castle, or the Heir Restored, A Gothic Story’ (1799). Even though it is not a Gothic novel, Watt also discusses Reeve’s Memoirs of Sir Roger de Clarendon in the context of the Loyalist Gothic and the French Revolution. As Watt notes, during the conflict with France, such tales refashioned the self-image of Britain and ‘led to the “historical” category of Gothic being purged of its associations with either democracy or frivolity and defined increasingly in terms of a proud military heritage’ (1999, 44). Castles are central to many of these works and, rather than conjuring up terrific images of the Bastille, are ‘viewed as symbols of the immemorial, if embattled, authority of Fortress Britain’ (55).
Such works are particularly interesting when considered alongside Burke’s conservative historical attitudes in the *Reflections* (especially in terms of his association of castles with ancient constitutions) and the increasingly nationalistic nature of historical writing in this period. Indeed, castles in these narratives serve to remind Britons of what holds them together historically and, in general, the Loyalist Gothic calls for unity at a time of national crisis.

Gothic pasts not only continued to be shaped by the menacing events taking place across the Channel; they became increasingly influenced by the situation at home. In order to prevent a similar revolution taking place in Britain, the Prime Minister, William Pitt the Younger, swiftly implemented a number of repressive and abrasive policies to silence reformers and those whose political agitation was, in his view, counter to the national interest. *Habeas corpus* was suspended on 12 May, 1794. This was the same day that saw the arrest of Thomas Hardy, a leading radical of the London Corresponding Society (LCS): an organisation perceived by Government to be encouraging political “revolution” along French lines. Ten other London radicals were arrested shortly after this and, in September, the famous Treason Trials got under way. The Treasonable Practises Act and Seditious Meetings Act of 1795 (often referred to as the “Two Acts”) broadened definitions of treason and aimed to limit anti-government activities by prohibiting political meetings of more than fifty people taking place. Pitt established spy networks, ‘believing, or professing to believe, that the radical societies threatened a “whole system of insurrection… laid in the modern doctrine of the rights of man”’ (Porter 2000, 450). Fearing invasion and the spread of dangerous foreign radicalism, Britain was gripped by fear and paranoia. This had significant implications for the historical settings of Gothic narratives.

In terms of the historical locations of Gothic novels discussed in this thesis, the Gothic can be seen to move forward in time periods: the events described in *Otranto* took place somewhere between the eleventh- and thirteenth- centuries, Reeve chose the fifteenth century for *The Old English Baron*, *The Recess* is set in the sixteenth century, while Radcliffe elected for a seventeenth century past in *The Romance of the Forest*. Furthermore, in *The Italian* (1797)—the novel that followed *The Mysteries of Udolpho*—Radcliffe deviates from her previous works by electing not to set the action on the Gothic cusp; instead, she chooses to set her novel in the very recent past, the late 1750s. Even though it is still a Female Gothic novel and features the plight of its heroine, Antonia, *The Italian* represents a contrast to her previous works. As Robert Miles points out, this is a Gothic novel of spies, informers, false witnesses and forged plots in a way ‘quite unlike
any of Radcliffe’s previous romances’ (2004, xxiii). Discussions of The Italian frequently argue that Radcliffe was (at least in part) reacting to Lewis’s The Monk: a novel that also features spying, subplots and conspiracies. Radcliffe’s and Lewis’s novels both feature the Inquisition, the mysterious workings of which, among other things, preyed on its readers fears by offering parallels to Pitt’s spy networks and the general sense of paranoia that gripped Britain at this time. The Italian and The Monk respond to the politics and mood of the moment. Geographical remoteness was still an important facet of these novels, but there was less emphasis on historical displacement.

With the implementation of draconian legislation designed to restrict the spread of radicalism, late eighteenth-century Britain had become a frightening place. As a result, some Gothic novels exploited this climate of fear and dispensed with the geographical and historical displacement traditionally associated with such works. One such novel to do so was William Godwin’s Things As They Are; or the Adventures of Caleb Williams (1794). Capturing the national mood, Godwin writes that ‘Terror was the order of the day’ and, setting his Gothic novel in contemporary Britain, takes aim at ‘the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism by which man becomes the destroyer of man’ (2005a, 3–4). Godwin was one of England’s most eminent philosophers and his famous work of political philosophy, An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Political Justice (1793), was a rebuttal of Burke’s Reflections. Godwin targets the corruption of government, arguing that it threatens individuality and uses the law as a tool of oppression. These radical ideas receive expression in Caleb Williams. Featuring the relentless pursuit and surveillance of Caleb Williams (the novel’s hero) by Falkland (the novel’s Gothic villain) and his malevolent agent, Gines, Godwin’s novel bears obvious resemblances to its own historico-political moment. As Ian Ousby notes, even though the Treason Trials came after Caleb Williams had been completed, the emphasis on the law and the various legal proceedings that feature in the novel reveal that it ‘grew out of the political milieu of which the trials are the clearest expression’ (1974, 49). As Godwin’s epigraph to this chapter demonstrates, tyranny is not exclusive to Revolutionary France; it is manifest at home in corrupt social institutions and mechanisms such as the law (a subject that, as this thesis has demonstrated, is central to Gothic narratives). Utilising the political potential and popularity of the Gothic genre to pursue certain ideas manifest in Political Justice, Godwin depicts a nightmare vision of late eighteenth-century society. Let down by institutions designed to protect the innocent, Caleb begins to see ‘the whole human species as so many hangmen and torturers… confederated to tear me to pieces’ (Godwin 2005a, 190). Even though
Godwin’s novel was published in 1794—the same year as The Mysteries of Udolpho—it represents a momentous moment for the Gothic and signals a new, alternative direction for the genre. As the title of his novel, Things as they Are, suggests, the Gothic was no longer entirely dependent on the past as a site of terror. The nature of history and the destructive potential of the past still remained central to the Gothic, but, with the present becoming a more frightening place than the past, contemporary society became a new setting for Gothic narratives.

Mary Wollstonecraft, who Godwin married in 1797 and who shared his radicalism, follows a similar approach in her unfinished work, Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman (1797). The novel begins by explicitly invoking the Gothic genre:

Abodes of horror have frequently been described, and castles, filled with spectres and chimeras, conjured up by the magic spell of genius to harrow the soul, and absorb the wondering mind. But, formed of such stuff as dreams are made of, what were they to the mansion of despair, in one corner of which Maria sat, endeavouring to recall her scattered thoughts! (Wollstonecraft 1994, 7)

Featuring the plight of the female protagonist, Maria (a woman who has been incarcerated in a madhouse by her abusive husband), Wollstonecraft does not locate Gothic terrors in the imagination or the past, but shows that “‘Gothic” horrors are social realities for women’ (Mellor 2007, 242). In a similar vein to Caleb Williams, Maria takes aim at the law. However, Wollstonecraft specifically targets marital law and, by doing so, fictionalises a number of her arguments from A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (a work inspired by the debates surrounding the French Revolution). As the epigraph to this chapter suggests, the horrors associated with the Bastille are not exclusive to France; they are experienced everyday by countless women in England who are ‘caged for life’ as a result of oppressive and unfair marital laws (Wollstonecraft 1994, 77). Employing Gothic language and themes, Wollstonecraft launches a savage attack on the ‘partial laws and customs of society’ that ensure the ‘misery and oppression of women’ (5) and that render the world a ‘vast prison’ for them (11). Maria refuses to use a fictional past as a subterfuge to comment on the present and brings the Gothic to bear on women’s plight in eighteenth-century England. As Carol Margaret Davison notes, Wollstonecraft ‘strips away the veneer’ of the established Female Gothic and ‘bring[s] its socio-political agenda into starker focus’ (2009, 148). Indeed, both Godwin’s and Wollstonecraft’s novels make explicit some of the political aspects of the Gothic that had always been implicit.
As this Afterword has shown, the crisis in Britain triggered by the French Revolution resulted in a variety of Gothic responses and accelerated the Gothic’s movement through historical time. This new option for Gothic fiction—dark and brooding narratives set in the present—had significant implications for the development of the historical novel. \(^9\) Romantic writers would also continue to dialogue with the Gothic and its new sources of terror. \(^10\) However, my focus here remains on novels of the Gothic genre, which, in later manifestations, would utilise both historical and contemporary settings. For example, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) is set in the present, Charles Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) leads the reader from the early nineteenth- to the late seventeenth-century, while the events described in James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) take place in the seventeenth century. However, an important distinction must be made here. Even though some Gothic works were no longer set in specific historical periods, they still utilised Gothic attitudes towards the past. The Gothic is haunted by its own history. Inherited from its early contentious relationship with Enlightenment modes of historical representation, the Gothic continues to be preoccupied with the nature of the past; whether it is the complex authorship and epistolary nature of *Frankenstein*, the elaborate series of tales that comprise *Melmoth* or the challenging structure and religious content of Hogg’s *Private Memoirs*. Moreover, even in narratives set in the present, Gothic historical themes continue to pervade the genre. Macabre histories, repressed pasts, the survival of barbaric customs in the present and the propensity of the past to return and disrupt the present remain central to such fictions. Indeed, humankind’s “Gothic” relationship with the past continues to be a source of fascination for such works. Furthermore, Gothic writers began to rely increasingly on first person narration for Gothic stories. \(^11\) This led to the development of a number of recognisable Gothic themes. As the detailed psychological introspection of *Caleb Williams* demonstrates, the presence of history in the human psyche and the propensity of the past to poison the mind—a theme which receives early expression in Lee’s *The Recess*—became increasingly prominent in future Gothic works. Throughout the Romantic period and beyond, sinister pasts and dark stories would continue to haunt the Gothic imagination.

Notes

1. The influence of *The Mysteries Udolpho* on later novelists was immeasurable. As Norton points out, ‘[i]mitations, derivative adaptations, plagiarism, borrowings and inspirations’ exploited Radcliffe’s work to an unprecedented degree (2000, 41). Indeed, Norton points out that ‘about a third of all novels published
between 1796 and 1806, and many serials in ladies’ magazines’ had scenes inspired by Radcliffe (40). Even though most of these works were inferior and helped to bring the genre into disrepute, they enjoyed great popularity. This was aided by the growing influence of circulating libraries and the expansion of the Gothic into the bluebook and chapbook markets. The predictable and formulaic nature of such productions also made the Gothic a target for satire and parody in works such as Austen’s Northanger Abbey. For an overview of the imitations that Radcliffe’s works inspired, see Norton’s Gothic Readings (2000, 40–44).

2. Lewis had lost interest in writing his novel, The Monk, until he read The Mysteries of Udolpho in May 1794. Radcliffe’s work inspired him to complete it: ‘I was induced to go on with it by reading “the Mysteries of Udolphi,” which is in my opinion one of the most interesting Books that ever have been published’ (Lewis 2000).

3. As Norton notes (2000, 106), ‘[n]ovels of sensibility (such as Goethe’s Werther) flowed into the channel of terror earlier in Germany than in England, and developed into the well-defined sub-genres Ritter-, Räuber- und Schauerroman (novels about knights or robbers, and shudder novels)’. English translations of such stories proved popular in England during the 1790s and were very influential on English works. Particularly significant translations include Benedicte Naubert’s Herman of Unna (1794), Johann Christian Friedrich von Schiller’s The Ghost-Seer, or Apparationist (1795), Cajetan Tschink’s Victim of Magical Delusions, or the Mystery of the Revolution in P—I, a magico-political tale (1795) and Marquis Grosse’s Genius (1796). This strain of Gothic fiction became known as the School of Horror or “the German school.” Critics such as Norton have often used Radcliffe’s distinction between terror and horror to define such literature. In contrast to Radcliffe’s fictions, which tend to be set in Italy or France, the settings employed by the School of Horror are often German, sometimes Spanish and sometimes English. Furthermore, rather than creating terror through suggestion and implied supernatural occurrences, the German school employed real demons and gory scenes. To use Norton’s words, ‘[i]ncest and rape become almost commonplace, and scenes of torture and death are portrayed in lurid physical detail’ (107). ‘Chapbook condensations’, he adds, ‘helped to intensify such horrors, for they spared no room for the niceties of landscape description or character development’ (107). Lewis was very familiar with German folk tales and supernatural ballads, and such works had a significant impact on his fictional technique in The Monk.

4. Watt argues that, even though Reeve’s Memoirs of Sir Roger de Clarendon ‘cannot be regarded as a Gothic romance by any modern criteria’, it ‘nonetheless offers an instructive statement of purpose which serves to illuminate its choice of an English medieval setting’ (1999, 59). This choice of setting is particularly significant in the context of the French Revolution; a subject Reeve was quite vocal about. Indeed, similarly to many Britons looking on at the events taking place in France, her views changed considerably throughout the 1790s. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Reeve initially supported the French Revolution, but she withdrew her support when it turned violent. After the September Massacres at Paris in 1792, she writes to Walker, ‘What times do we live in?—My politics are all overthrown’ (Reeve 2003b). Reeve continued to comment on the French Revolution in the Memoirs of Sir Roger de Clarendon. In accordance with her classical republican political views, she deplores despotic government and levelling politics. Speaking of the situation in France, she argues that it was ‘a faction of bold, ignorant, flagitious men, who associated together to oppose the constitution, the laws, and the king; and to overturn all kinds of
government. They seduced the populace to espouse their party, by holding out the word *equality* as a bait to catch them, and then keep them under by the worst kind of despotism’ (1793, 1: 225). ‘Let Britain shudder at the scene before her, and grasp her blessings the closer’, she implores (1: xx). For a broader discussion of Reeve’s attitude towards the French Revolution, see Kelly’s ‘Clara Reeve, Provincial Bluestocking: From the Old Whigs to the Modern Liberal State’ (2003, 115–25).

5. As Peardon notes, Burke’s *Reflections* triggered a new phase of English nationalism in historical writing. Burke’s notion that English liberty was more secure than elsewhere in Europe because its roots stretched far back into the distant past was particularly influential. ‘This teaching of Burke marked a new emphasis on national differences in government and history’, notes Peardon (1933, 164). As the war with France intensified throughout the 1790s and into the nineteenth century, there was a greater emphasis on British exceptionalism, war sentiment and the need to defend time-honoured British freedoms. Peardon discusses a number of historical works which exhibit such views, such as Robert Macfarlane’s *History of the Reign of George III* (1790–96), Herbert Marsh’s *The History of the Politicks of Great Britain and France, from the time of the Conference at Pillnitz, to the declaration of war against Great Britain* (published in German in 1791 and translated into English in 1800) and Robert Bisset’s *The History of the Reign of George III to the termination of the late war* (1803). For more information on these histories and the increasingly nationalist nature of historiography in the late eighteenth century, see Peardon’s *The Transition in English Historical Writing 1760–1830* (1933, 161–82).

6. The Inquisition begins to play an increasingly prominent role in Gothic fiction during the 1790s; it features in German tales of terror, Lewis’s *The Monk* and Radcliffe’s *The Italian*. As well as offering parallels to spy networks in Britain, the Inquisition—an institution which covertly converts people to Roman Catholicism—became a source of fascination for writers and readers of Gothic fiction. With its mysterious operations, gloomy dungeons and instruments of torture, it became an ideal subject to evoke fear and terror.

7. Although the classification of Godwin’s novel remains contentious, it has a number of identifiable Gothic themes: the past returning to destroy the present, a concern with transgression, evil villains, persecution, suffering, repressed histories and scenes of sustained suspense and terror.

8. Godwin was not only attracted to the possibilities afforded by the Gothic genre; he was aware of the wider political potential of romance. He was particularly interested in the relationship between literature and history. In his essay, ‘Of History and Romance’ (1797), Godwin argues that history is ‘little better than romance under a graver name’ (2005b, 368) and that ‘all history bears too near a resemblance to fable’ (367). ‘Nothing is more uncertain, more contradictory, more unsatisfactory than the evidence of facts’, he adds (367). Godwin even takes aim at the historiography of Hume and Robertson, arguing that neither experience or excite emotions (366) and that the ‘logical deduction and calculation of probabilities’ that defines such histories may ‘sharpen our faculty of discrimination, but it answers none of the legitimate purposes of history’ (368). For Godwin, the ‘writer of romance’ is ‘to be considered as the writer of real history’ (372). Countering the grand narratives of modern Enlightenment historiography, he favours individual narratives that are capable of capturing the complex psychological motives that drive the historical agent. He also posits that general histories poison societies by suggesting that the individual cannot make an impact on or change
history. In his view romance is, therefore, a fairer and truer type of history because it restores a sense of imagination and possibility to society.

9. Intertwined with historical settings and subjects, it is widely acknowledged that the Gothic played a major role in the development of the historical novel in Britain. As Anne H. Stevens points out, with the Gothic becoming less dependent on historical settings, the historical novel began to inhabit some of the historical space that it vacated and became a more distinctive genre in its own right (2010, 49). With the divergence of these genres, they developed distinct generic identities and became associated with certain features and characteristics: readers of historical novels get ‘increasingly detailed depictions of historical settings and personages’ while readers of the Gothic came to expect macabre incidents and sensations of terror and horror (76).

10. Dispensing with the genre’s sensationalism, the Romantics would continue to communicate with the Gothic, its emphasis on the sublime and attitudes towards history. Despite his aversion to the flood of Gothic tales that inundated the literary marketplace during the 1790s, Coleridge was heavily influenced by the genre. For example, his poems Christabel (1798–1801) and The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1798) focus on events in the past, employ brooding atmospheres and flirt with the supernatural. Percy Bysshe Shelley was also inspired by the Gothic: Zastrozzi: A Romance (1810), St. Irvyne; or The Rosicrucian (1810) and The Cenci (1819) feature persecution and Gothic villains.

11. Shelley’s Frankenstein, Maturin’s Melmoth and Hogg’s Private Memoirs all employ first person narration. Another notable work influenced by the Gothic and its depiction of tortured psychological states is Thomas De Quincey’s The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater (1821): a narrative which reveals the nightmares, paranoia and despair experienced by the author as a result of his drug addiction.
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