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CLARA REEVE  
THE OLD ENGLISH BARON



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When Sir Philip Harclay returns to England after a long absence, he finds that his childhood friend, Arthur, Lord Lovel, is no longer alive, and that the castle and estates of the Lovel family have twice changed hands. But a mysteriously abandoned set of rooms in the castle of Lovel promises to disclose the secrets of the past. After a series of frantic episodes and surprising revelations, culminating in a trial by combat, the crimes of the usurper and the legitimacy of the true heir are finally discovered.

## The Old English Baron Details

Date : Published April 8th 2004 by Oxford University Press (first published 1777)

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Author : Clara Reeve

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## From Reader Review The Old English Baron for online ebook

### Darke Conteur says

In my quest to read more classic novels, I came across this book on Kobo under their public domain section.

First published in 1778, it is not an original piece, but rather a re-write of another book; The Castle of Otranto which was written twenty years prior. I found this very interesting, as now a days, such an undertaking would be nothing short of plagiarism. Curious, I looked up and downloaded the original book as well.

An English Baron is the tale of a young man, a peasant by birth (or so we are led to believe), friended by the Lord of the land and given opportunities alongside his Master's children. After spending a night in the 'haunted' part of the castle, young Edmund begins a journey to discover who he really is.

It is a story of jealousy and envy, and how keeping your enemies in your heart, despite their transgressions, will make you the better person.

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### Charles says

The Castle of Otranto was so popular that it spawned imitators almost at once. This was one of those, but also stands as a decent story and a very early story in the gothic genre.

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### Alex says

"A ghost," sniffs Clara Reeve, "must keep within certain limits of credibility."

She's complaining about The Castle of Otranto (1764), the original Gothic novel. Giant death helmets and moving paintings, she argues, "instead of attention, excite laughter." Which is true, and Castle of Otranto is silly - but it's also *entertaining*, unlike The Old English Baron (1778).

The story in this slim and forgettable book is a watered-down Hamlet. Ghosts cry out for vengeance; etc. Along the way we hit many of the standard Gothic tropes, which means that it's time for

### The Gothic Novel Drinking Game!

*for which I was helped by this terrific Guardian article, and also by my friend Dawn*

#### One Drink

- Fainting
- Creepy noises
- Nasty weather
- Impenetrably ornate sentences
- Eyes are scary

## Two Drinks

- A suit of armor makes an appearance without someone in it
- +1 and falls over, making a racket
- Sinister paintings (lockets acceptable)
- A lady is in her nightgown
- Virginity is threatened

## Three Drinks

- An "irruption of poems" (h/t Schmidt for phrasing)
- It's an epistolary

### Characters

- Someone could be described as "Byronic"
- Surprise relative!
- +1 almost incest
- +2 actual incest
- relative turns out to be a villain
- There is a monster or ghost
- +1 monster turns out to be villainous relative

*(the "Scooby Doo Bonus")*

### Setting

- There is a castle
- +1 castle is from Gothic period
- +1 castle is busted
- +1 castle is in isolated location
- +1 castle is cursed
- +2 castle has secret passageways and/or forbidden wing

So. The first three quarters of the book will get you drunk as fuck, and it's fine. It's not bad. It's not really much of anything, to be honest. Unfortunately by the time you get through the last quarter you'll be hung over, because it's just everyone endlessly congratulating each other on figuring everything out. (A la the last third of Pamela, a book Reeve admired.) It's almost as boring as *Mysteries of Udolpho*, which also deals in sober, credible ghosts, and is also lame.

So here's the thing: if you didn't want to be silly, you shouldn't have written a Gothic. Give the choice between credibility and silliness, I'll take *The Monk*.

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## Bill Kerwin says

Not appreciating the pre-camp sensibility of "Otranto," Reeve toned down the supernatural element in the gothic in order to fashion a fiction less baroque and ridiculous than Walpole's. She succeeded, but produced something far inferior: a gothic narrative so staid and so filled with courteous, well-bred characters (even the murderer!) that the reader is completely bored by the time he reaches the end of this very short novel.

The denouement (featuring a detailed description of an ad hoc commission of nobles designed--among other things--to resolve a property dispute) is excruciatingly dull, even by the Clara Reeve standard.

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### **Mika says**

Watch as Edmund makes friends, enemies, and finds out the truth about his birth. All while battling his acute separation anxiety.

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### **Juan David says**

A work of Gothic Literature, this novel was inspired directly from Horace Walpole's "The Castle of Otranto". Clara Reeve wanted to create a work of Gothic Literature much more realistic. While Walpole's novel dealt with an armored giant and fantastic ghostly events, Reeve's novel focused on the relation between characters, lineage, and ultimately a stark presentation of the homoerotic relationship between Edmund and William. It is also a novel important not only to Queer studies but also Feminist studies because of that homoerotic relationship and what it tells us about the female characters in the novel.

An interesting thing about this work of early Gothic literature is the fact that the novel is not divided into chapters or sections. The style is archaic and overall the novel presents a highly sexualized notion of the sublime in the form of power.

I really liked this novel.

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### **John says**

What a fabulous story. Highly recommended.

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### **Jayaprakash Satyamurthy says**

A riposte to Otranto, in much the same way as Radcliffe's 'The Italian' was a riposte to Lewis' 'The Monk'. Not very good; the plot is entirely predictable and there is no real sense of danger to the virtuous hero and his allies. The best bit of writing here is the preface where Reeve craves the reader's indulgence in prose that shows a verve and intelligence that is sadly missing elsewhere. Significant to the history of the gothic genre, but not really as gripping as a lot of those novels still are.

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### **Michelle says**

First published in 1777, this was an ambitious re-write of Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. Since I've read Walpole's gothic novel, I was curious to know what the re-write has to offer. And to be honest, despite the negative reviews, I liked *The Old English Baron* much more than I did *The Castle of Otranto*.

Edmund, the hero, was a pious, good, noble and all the other good qualities that can be found in this world. The Baron even favored him over everyone although blood relationships made him discreet in his treatment. Everyone who met him loved him, except the villains, who were of course evil and incapable of appreciating his qualities. (Meh!) Which made Sir Robert appeared more interesting than the rest of them. He did not like Edmund due to his cousins' insinuations, however, he also did not unreasonably cruel to him.

As per the requirement of most Gothic novels, there were the mysterious infants, lost/robbed inheritance, wronged relatives, and plenty of weeping. Also, Reeve further introduced another trend, kneeling. There was plenty of kneeling that can be found here.

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### **Lee Foust says**

The second English "Gothic Story" after Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, *The Old English Baron* is a bit like Ann Radcliffe's re-write and domestication of Lewis's *The Monk* with her own romance *The Italian*. It's an interesting fact that female as much or even more than male authors were first attracted to Walpole's combination of medieval setting, Shakespearean motifs and form, and the supernatural which soon came to be known as the Gothic. Female authors, however, shied away from the violent excesses of what Radcliffe called "Horror" in favor of the suspense and suggestiveness of "Terror," which left the murder, rape, and blood out in favor of strong heroines surviving on their wits and the ghosts all turning out to be ill-placed sheets flapping in the wind. Here we have the very first ever are-you-brave-enough-to-spend-a-night-in-the-haunted-room? plot of the genre! Commendable even if later authors exploited it for fear considerably better.

Reeve isn't quite as domesticating as Radcliffe and the ghost here is as real as can be but plays a role no bigger in the drama than to call the protagonist to action--as the ghost of Hamlet's father sets that tragedy in motion. And, interestingly, there are almost no female characters at all in this romance, but the men are so frequently rational, understanding, and choked with emotion that I found myself really wishing actual men acted this way--it was far too feminine to be true. Which I think is probably the best reason to read this novel today--it's feminized men display all of the finest characteristic associated with our construction of both genders and it's kind of a blast to see humanity presented this way. I suppose Reeve thought she was replicating the codes of medieval chivalry but it's much more like a utopic Amazon warrior planet in a cyber-fem sci. fi. novel.

Stylistically, despite Walpole's opinion that Reeve's second Gothic story of the soon-to-be genre was "dull stuff," *The Old English Baron* is actually quite a bit better written than his *The Castle of Otranto*. Walpole gets so carried away by his own novel blending of Shakespeare, the realistic novel, and the medieval romance, that his imagination gets the better of him and not only is his giant ghost more laughable than frightening, his posturing characters border on parody and the drama is more likely to make one chuckle than shiver. Not that *The Old English Baron* ever chilled, but it was considerably more understated, economical, and the characters--although stock images of virtue and malice--felt much more like real people than Walpole's posturing Shakespearean actors in drag. Also Reeve's narrative is continuous and really quite smooth while Walpole imitates Shakespeare's five act formula with five chapters clearly divided up into scenes themselves and jerks the reader back and forth quite a bit.

As usual with 18th century Gothic it tells you so much more about 18th century values and social norms than anything remotely medieval. It's like looking at space-age furniture made in the 1950s, a novel mix of medieval images and 18th century manners and concerns--particularly their fears in the form of what frightens them. Judging from both Walpole and Reeve it was heirs, as in the realistic novels of the period as

well. I found myself reading this concurrently with *Pride and Prejudice*, which entails the problems surrounding an entail and the proper passing on of the gentry's property to their heirs, for instance. (And, since I was reading them concurrently I'm am going to lobby for a resurrection of the oft-used but now forgotten word "approbation." The key to understanding the British gentry's attitude of the 18th century was surely "approbation" and "disapprobation." Time to bring 'em back for political discussions on facebook--"Sir, you have earned my deepest disapprobation with your ignorant opinions regarding...")

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## Kim says

*The Old English Baron* is a novel written in 1777 by Clara Reeve. Our story begins with Sir Philip Harclay, he has just returned to England after many years abroad. In his youth, Sir Philip had developed a life-long friendship for the Lord Lovel, military duties had separated them and Sir Philip had stopped receiving answers to his letters to Lord Lovel. As soon as he returns to his home in England he sets about to discover what has happened to his friend. He travels to the home of Lord Lovel only to discover that the Lord was killed on his way home from a battle years earlier; that his pregnant wife died of grief; and that the title and estates were inherited by a cousin, the present Lord Lovel. The new Lord Lovel however, disliked the property and sold it to his brother-in-law, Lord Fitz-Owen, who I am assuming is the "old English Baron", although there end up being so many "Lords" in this I'm not totally sure.

So Sir Philip gets to the Castle of Lovel, meets the baron and his family and also a son of a local cottager, Edmund Twyford, who has become a close friend to the baron's sons, and can do just about anything better as far as I could tell. Our Edmund can shoot bow and arrow better, is better with a sword, is better reading literature, has a better personality, and is better looking, you get the idea. Nobody seems to mind this when they are young but eventually most of the male family members seem to get jealous of Edmund and begin to plot against him. Everything they try to "get" Edmund backfires and he ends up looking even better than ever. So this type of thing goes on for awhile when the priest tells Edmund a story of the "haunted" section of the castle. A section that has been closed off for years and no one ever enters, and that kind of thing. Because of this conversation Edmund is challenged to spend three nights in the haunted wing, both to prove his courage and to disprove the stories of ghosts.

Now this part of the story I found extremely strange; on the second night of his three night stay he is joined by the priest Father Oswald and a servant Joseph. While they are sitting there talking they hear from the rooms below them a sound of "clashing arms", and something heavy falling over. They go to investigate, behind a door is a staircase leading below. There is a closet in the room, locked but with the key there. Inside is Lord Lovel's bloody armor. Edmund then discovers some loose boards in the floor, hidden by a table. Suddenly "a dismal hollow groan was heard as if from underneath". OK, now they hear something groaning and this is what they do, Father Oswald made signs for them to kneel and he prays for the peace of the soul departed. Then Edmund vows to devote himself to the discovery of this secret, then he locks the door, keeps the key, and they all return upstairs. That's it for now. Now later in the book they will return to this room and look under the table, but not until almost the end. If I were in a room and heard groaning from under a table, I would certainly push the table away, remove the boards, and see if anyone is being kept prisoner in some dungeon under the floor, or some such thing. I certainly wouldn't just lock the door and go away.

Anyway, after this point, Edmund does eventually solve the mystery of the groaning under the table. He "disappears" from the castle and winds up staying with Sir Philip. Sir Philip helps him solve all the mysteries and sort everything out. All kinds of stuff happens, the bad guys who hated Edmund from the first confess and go away, sort of like that anyway. There is a duel, although oddly enough about the duel, our author

spends more time on telling us all the people who will be at the duel, who is fighting, who the witnesses are, we have a doctor, a priest, the Lord who owns the land where they duel, it goes on and on. Longer than the duel lasts.

But strangely for me, the most annoying thing about the book was all the kneeling everybody did. It just got on my nerves after awhile. Here we go:

*Upon this Edmund kneeled to the Baron; he embraced his knees.*

*He kneeled down with clasped hands, and uplifted eyes. William kneeled by him, and they invoked the Supreme to witness to their friendship, and implored His blessing upon it. They then rose up and embraced each other, while tears of cordial affection bedewed their cheeks.*

*Here he stopped; and Edmund, whose sighs almost choked him, threw himself at the Baron's feet, and wet his hand with his tears.*

*Upon this, Edmund threw himself at her feet, and embraced her knees.*

*As he drew near, he was seized with an universal trembling; he kneeled down, took his hand, kissed it, and pressed it to his heart in silence.*

*Edmund approached his friend and patron; he put one knee to the ground, he embraced his knees with the strongest emotions of grief and anxiety.*

You get the idea anyway. I usually like my characters to be "good" or "bad" but even for me Edmund was a little too good. So I give the book overall two stars. Who knows what will happen when I re-read it someday. For now, it's time for the next one, happy reading. :-}

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### **Sotiris Karaiskos says**

It is commonly accepted that his first gothic novel it's the The Castle of Otranto , after reading, however, this book I now have the impression that this is the first REAL gothic novel, a book that has all the elements which will dominate over the next few decades in gothic literature. The story is typical of the genre, with its predominant element being the effort of a young man to correct injustices of past years, which came from people without ethical principles. At the end, naturally, through some adventures and with the intervention of supernatural powers the divine order is restored, thus transferring the Christian message that at the end the good will triumph and love will conquer everything. Beyond that, the element that connects the book with anything that followed is the wonderful writing which describes in an excellent way particularly emotional situations (maybe to emotional) and creates an atmosphere of mystery which enchants the reader. So in the end what I can say is that it is a book of particular importance in the history of literature and also a very entertaining one, even for the modern reader. This is why I will go against the current and give it the perfect score.

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### **Sean says**

I went into this knowing the story of, "The Castle of Otranto" and this was a great introduction to the early gothic novels for me.

Basically it is about a man trying to prove he is of higher stature and honestly I was not bored at any part of it.

It was easy to follow, the language was not too 'flowery' and it was a fast paced story. The only thing I didn't like was I would have had more of a scare with the ghost, at one point theres only 2 lines describing how Edmund basically gets to meet his parents.

8/10

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### **Jana Eichhorn says**

DNF.

I bailed on Otranto, so I don't know what made me think that I'd be all about this one. Life is too short for this.

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### **Lawrence says**

Didn't have any of the things I expected, but did have a truly beautiful love between William and Edmund, and some particularly obvious avoidance of legal authority. Also a hilarious genealogy of an ending, and some not-explained supernatural.

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