The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction
Killeen, Jarlath

Published by Edinburgh University Press

Killeen, Jarlath.
The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction: Histories, Origins, Theories.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/64122.
Chapter 3

Mad Love:  
*The Adventures of Miss Sophia Berkley* and the Politics of Consent

There’s no love in your violence.¹

I

Like a beleaguered Jane Austen heroine, Ireland, in the eighteenth century at least, had to get herself married off. The only question appeared to be the possible bridegroom. Early in the century, Irish Anglican political opinion appeared eager to support an Anglo-Irish union of hearts, but the man in this case treated the overtures of his potential spouse with deep suspicion, when he didn’t ignore them completely. An Irish parliamentary address requesting union in 1703 was passed over with almost no comment at all, and eventually the Irish got the message. In the Injured Lady pamphlets, Swift offered a completely endogamous solution to Ireland’s problems in a marriage of convenience with the Anglican enclave. The Swiftian solution increasingly became the most attractive one to Irish Anglicans as the eighteenth century progressed – letting Ireland marry a man now seen as a foreign cad didn’t seem like such a good idea when he was intent on patronising you, stealing your money and reducing you to the status of a paid servant. In an anticipation of the now extremely hackneyed plot of a romantic comedy, Irish Anglicans started to hope that the boy-next-door would prove a better match than the rogue to whom the heroine seemed initially far more attracted. Ultimately, it was not to be, and a shotgun marriage between Britain and Ireland was hastily arranged at the end of the century, but until that moment, it was unclear who would be victor. Indeed, in 1782, with the granting of legislative independence, it looked as if the best man had won as political and domestic power was granted to the Irish Anglican enclave over Ireland herself. The 1798 rebellion, however, proved that Irish Anglicans simply could not keep their house in order,
and the (un)loveable rogue Britain re-entered the stage at the last minute to steal the girl away.

One of the reasons why the marriage metaphor was important was because legislative union was one of the central ‘themes’ of eighteenth-century Irish politics, and marriage was from the very start of this discussion a way to think through the implications of the unionist project. We now tend to think of the metaphor of union-as-marriage as most important for the end of the century when the debate on what would eventually be passed as the Act of Union was in full swing, and certainly this metaphor can be found everywhere in the political discourse of the 1790s and early 1800s. Claire Connolly quotes one pamphlet, *To be, or not to be, a Nation; that is the Question?* (1799), which described the union as ‘a treaty of marriage’, and prayed, ‘God grant that they may turn out a happy couple, and that the said union may not terminate in a divorce!’ Connolly also notes the absence of any mention of love in contemporary pamphlets using marriage as a union metaphor, despite the way the companionate marriage had become a staple of the novel of romance by this stage. Maria Edgeworth, though generally favourable to a union, famously claimed that ‘England has no right to do to Ireland good against her will’, implicating the Act of Union in a narrative of rape and enforcement rather than true love and companionship.

While attention has been lavished on the unionist discourse of the late eighteenth century, though, a union of Ireland with Britain was on the cards throughout the century, and marriage was generally the favoured metaphor used in discussion. Union was not a new theme in Anglo-Irish affairs, introduced in the 1790s, but had been a persistent issue throughout the eighteenth century. What is crucial to understand is that while Irish Anglicans to a greater or lesser extent were sympathetic to a union at the start of the eighteenth century, and therefore could envision it as a kind of companionate marriage, by the 1750s things had begun to change and Swift’s characterisation of relations between ‘lady’ Ireland and ‘gentleman’ England as based less on companionship and love than on exploitation and expropriation was appropriated in allegorical accounts of political realities and debates.

Positive support for a union from Irish Anglicans can be found in commentary from the early eighteenth century. In the first decade a union was formally requested three times by the Irish parliament, but, largely because of English political opinion, was turned down. In 1697, William King, the bishop of Derry, argued that a union would allow a kind of mutual ‘flourish[ing]’ of Ireland and England. William Molyneux, almost in an aside, suggested that a union was ‘an happiness we can hardly hope for’ in his famous *The case of Ireland . . . stated* (1698).
Henry Maxwell, the MP for Bangor, believed a union to be ‘highly beneficial to England as well as to Ireland by enlarging the foundation of its power, wealth and trade, and by strengthening the inward frame of its constitution’. After the Declaratory Act 1720 had demonstrated, pretty clearly, the view of the British government that Ireland was not a separate kingdom, William Nicolson, the then bishop of Derry, claimed that Irish Anglicans would be glad of ‘an incorporation into the United Kingdom of Great Britain as hath been allowed the Scots’. These declarations of support for a union were not all that unusual in terms of the sentiments being articulated by Irish Anglicans in the first half of the century. It should be noted, however, that when a union was being advocated, it was in order that the rights and liberties associated with English commonwealthmen could be guaranteed for Irish Anglicans – this was especially the case for advocates in the 1720s and 1730s like Arthur Dobbs, MP for Carrickfergus, and Samuel Madden, member of the Dublin Society.

However, by the mid-century, Irish Anglican opinion had changed. Indeed, so changed had the Irish Anglican attitude become that when Lord Hillsborough, MP in Westminster, proposed a union in 1751, he was attacked as a kind of madman. In the anonymous *An humble address to the nobility, gentry and freeholders of the kingdom of Ireland* (1751) his scheme was described as ‘preposterous, unnatural’, terms which suggest a rejection of the heterosexual marriage paradigm of union in favour of terms which see the union as an example of sexual perversion. The scheme was configured as not simply sexually dissipated but actually satanic in origin, ‘horrid’, ‘infernal’, ‘hellish’, and ‘abominable’, in danger of causing ‘black and dreadful scenes of desolation, calamity and distress’. Hillsborough was personally attacked as well, and dismissed as impudent and malicious, ‘a Blind, stupid Bizzard’, ‘brainless, short-sighted babbler’, a ‘poisonous, seditious, undermining Rat’:

> since Infamy is the most tormenting Punishment in this World for Guilt and Villany, next to that Worm within, which preyeth upon the Conscience of those who are Partakers of the Works of Darkness; let all those who are desirous to breed Rancour, Jealousy and Confusion, between two Sister-Nations, be assured; That besides the Malediction of the Present Age, their Iniquity will be accursed from Generation to Generation.

The anonymous pamphleteer is driven by what he sees as Hillsborough’s disgraceful slight on Ireland’s equality as a separate kingdom. In other words, part of his desire to emphasise the sororal relationship is his realisation that, were Britain to be gendered male and Ireland female,
marriage between them would be at least a plausible scenario, and in such a marriage, a female Ireland would be doomed to a naturally subordinate role. By maintaining equal sisterhoods, the pamphleteer can indicate that any union would by definition be unnatural and indeed ‘infernal’, a violation of both human and divine law.

If the tide had turned against a union for Irish Anglicans, English politicians had also changed their minds and were now quite anxious to see such a union take place. Initially, English politicians thought Irish affairs could be controlled relatively easily without such a union, but, the more Irish Anglican patriots troubled smooth relations between the two countries, the more attractive direct control became. By the 1750s, important figures such as Henry Fox, Lord Hillsborough and George Dodington all began to argue for the merits of a legislative union as a way to guarantee control by the British parliament of Irish political affairs. In 1753, there was discussion of a possible union at the highest levels of the British government as the Prime Minister, Henry Pelham, fed up with how the undertaker system was operating, considered whether a union would solve problems in that direction. These discussions became quite advanced very quickly and the Prime Minister was presented with a paper on the benefits of union by the Irish surveyor-general, Arthur Dobbs, a paper which he considered at length, though nothing actually came of it. After the difficulties of the Money Bill dispute, British politicians were increasingly convinced that a tighter control was needed over Irish affairs. The Duke of Bedford, appointed Lord Lieutenant in 1757, argued that a new style of political control over the Irish parliament was needed as the undertaker system no longer seemed to be effective, and he insisted that far too much attention had been paid to fostering the different factions in Irish political life.

The union boat had sailed, by then, and the Irish political context had been changed utterly by the Money Bill dispute. The dispute, more than any other event in the early eighteenth century, politicised the Anglican population of Dublin, especially the literate population. The Dublin crowd had already become more politically active in the 1740s and had been energised by the Charles Lucas affair. Lucas was an apothecary with a reformist agenda in terms of corporation politics which ultimately widened to include a more nationally oriented patriotism. Although Lucas was eventually hounded out of national politics, he left behind a significant rhetorical legacy which was re-ignited by the Money Bill dispute. Indeed, the extent of popular patriot opinion in 1750s Dublin can hardly be exaggerated, and it was not uncommon for the populace to riot should this patriot perspective fail to be endorsed or supported by the Irish political system. As well as being a matter of high politics,
The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction

the Money Bill dispute spilled out into the cultural ether and generated a great deal of extra-parliamentary comment and support. A number of historians have traced the extent of this extra-parliamentary activity in toasts, bonfires, dinners, crowd activity, riots and pamphlets. All these avenues were used by ‘patriot’ and ‘castle’ supporters to articulate their case, although strangely, no one has yet mined the representation of these conflicts in the fiction of the day – especially in the emergence of the Gothic novel – a point which this chapter hopes to begin to address. Cultural products, even ones which appeared to have no direct bearing on the Irish political matters at hand, became appropriated and used as weapons for both sides in the dispute.

A good example of the way in which apparently unconnected cultural material could find itself appropriated by the politicised Dublin crowd for the purposes of commentary is the famous Smock Alley riot of 1754, which was sparked by the refusal of the actor West Digges to repeat the lines of Alcanor, senator of Mecca, in the play *Mahomet the Imposter* (1744), James Miller’s rewriting of Voltaire’s *Mahomet*. The lines, which complain about the imposition of Mahometan religion on the city of Mecca, were apparently interpreted by the audience (in a practical example of Frye’s theory of symbolic spread) as a commentary on the politics of the Money Bill dispute and the imposition of a foreign power’s politics on the city of Dublin. When Digges refused the audience’s demands of an encore, a riot ensued. This incident is a convincing demonstration that a Dublin audience in the mid-eighteenth century was inclined to read literature in a quasi-allegorical fashion, or – to be more accurate – to see literature (whatever its provenance) as symbolically spreading to intervene in contemporary events. It is more than likely that Digges himself, a known patriot, also saw the lines as a way to indirectly comment on the dispute. Indeed, 1750s Dublin was saturated with political allegories anyway. The Money Bill dispute sparked what Eoin Megennis describes as a ‘pamphlet war’, and many of these pamphlets resorted to direct allegory in order to represent the state of Irish politics at the time.

The literature that poured from the presses during and after the dispute also demonstrates the extent to which allegory itself was a default means by which politics was discussed in mid-century Ireland. David Dickson has observed that ‘much of the public rhetoric [of the Money Bill dispute] was coded’, and what is most noticeable about this code is its allegorical or symbolically spread status, where allegorical figures stand in for the major political and social players in the dispute. Many of these pamphlets were so popular that they were brought together in omnibus volumes such as *The Cabinet: Containing a Collection of*
Curious Papers, Relative to the Present Contests in Ireland (1754), and The Patriot Miscellany (1756) – the main collections consulted for the writing of this chapter – and they were read by a wide audience, including the elite. As Jacqueline Hill points out, there are a number of features shared by these pamphlets: they are all anonymous or pseudonymous, use irony and fictive elements including allegory to a very large extent, and they are more often than not written by the ‘patriot’ side of the political dispute (or, to put it this way, it was generally patriots who resorted to politics as allegory).¹⁵

The use of such fictive elements was partially dictated by the censorious nature of the Irish executive, which had quite strong powers of prosecution in terms of printed matter, as was witnessed in the Charles Lucas affair, the threat of prosecution prompting Lucas to flee the country in 1749. Honesty the Best Policy: Or, The History of Roger (1752) was the first of these allegorical patriotic pamphlets, in which Henry Boyle became the English squire Sir Roger de Coverly, and his enemies became objects of satire. The squire was one of the more popular allegorical figures for Boyle in the 1750s. Importantly for this study, some of the allegorical pamphlets echo the kinds of domestic and sexual scenarios played out in the aisling poems, the national novel and Swift’s Injur’d Lady pamphlets explored in the previous chapter. One of the best of the political pamphlets is The True Life of Betty Ireland . . . Together with Some account of her Elder Sister Blanch of Britain (1753), probably by Sir Richard Cox, possibly modelled on Swift’s Injur’d Lady.¹⁶ The pamphlet examines Irish history and resorts to the traditional representation of Ireland and Britain as women who have to fight off unwanted sexual advances while maintaining their virtue, encouraging what it calls a ‘better understanding’ between the two sisters.¹⁷ Betty represents Ireland, and she complains that her financial affairs are in tatters, as ‘her small Revenues had been embezzled by Agents, Farms let to insolvent Tenants, double Leases made out, huge Fines taken in Hand and sunk in their own Pockets. She was preyed upon by Vagabonds and Outlaws’. However, she is placed in a more dangerous situation because of the undesired attentions of ‘a Foreign Count’ who has fallen in love with her. Like the unwelcome suitors in the aisling poems, the foreign Count is prepared to rape and abduct Betty to have his way, but Cox goes further in making the Count the kind of man who will go on to become a prototypical Gothic villain. The Count is ‘an odious Monster’, who abducts her with his ‘Pack of outlandish Goths . . . to take Possession of her Freehold, and break down her Gates’. Betty is saved by her sister British Blanche, who ‘generously came in to her Assistance, repelled Force by Force, and rescued her from a Tyrant Ravisher’.¹⁸ The allegory
in this case refers to Queen Elizabeth’s protection of Ireland from the machinations of Philip II of Spain, but the implication of the pamphlet in the midst of a debate about a possible union between Ireland and Britain is that while a female Britain once stepped in to rescue Ireland from abduction and rape, a male Britain who turns his lustful attention on the beautiful Betty might look less like a rescuer and more like the rapacious foreign tyrant from whom Betty will need saving.

The abduction of women was not merely an allegorical threat in this period, of course, as actual kidnapping of women (usually women of fortune) was carried out with alarming frequency in eighteenth-century Ireland. Most of the abductions were by men who wished to marry the abducted women and therefore gain access to their money. The historian A. P. W. Malcomson, in his compelling study of these cases, provides the example of Miss Charlotte Newcomen of Carrigglas, County Longford, abducted by Thomas Johnston, a member of the local aristocracy, in 1772. Newcomen was worth a large amount on the marriage market, but that money was well protected in terms of family settlement, so the whole abduction was actually pointless. Unfortunately, this did not prevent Johnston from carrying it out anyway, possibly because he did not understand the complicated legal position of supposed heiresses. It may be instructive to give the account of Newcomen’s abduction as a comparison with that of poor ‘Betty Ireland’:

Miss Newcomen . . . made all the resistance that woman could do. She was dragged downstairs. On the first flight Miss Webster met her and caught her in her arms, then both held fast by the banister of the stair. Johnston, they say, cried out ‘Break their arms!’ . . . As Johnston came out of the door, a Miss Cornwell, niece to Mr Webster, who lived next door, struck him on the head with an iron pin which fastened his window . . . The poor soul [Miss Newcomen] . . . scratched Johnston’s face, cuffed Edwards, tore his hair, and kept herself so still by the help of an iron that was to the pillion, that they could not get her fixed to the horse, though they . . . dragged [her] barefoot through a street dirty as possible, and in their attempts to put her on horseback used her with as much roughness and as little delicacy as if she had been a common hussy.19

The kidnap was unsuccessful and Johnston was killed while trying to effect it. The relative frequency of incidents of this nature suggests that the educated Anglican population reading such allegorical pamphlets as *The True Life of Betty Ireland* would have been able to translate such fictions into the distressing realities for many women of the period, so that the gap between fiction and reality would have been quite small. Just as the use of common names for Ireland in the work of the eighteenth-century Gaelic poets may have increased the ability of their
audience to see real women as at least potential embodiments of Ireland (with very serious consequences for the political power of women in the long term), so too may the use of figures like Betty Ireland to discuss the Money Bill dispute have encouraged readers to see an association between Irish Anglican heiresses and Irish sovereignty, particularly with regard to the threats against the sexual integrity of both.

The politicisation of the Irish Anglican reading public climaxed in December 1759 when Dublin erupted in a very serious riot. The cause of the riot is simple enough to discern. Rumours of a now very unwelcome parliamentary union with Britain were floating in Dublin, and they coalesced around the fact that Chief Secretary Rigby was preparing to bring the heads of a bill to the Irish parliament which would enable it to be recalled quickly in an emergency. Rigby was particularly concerned at the time with the threat of a French invasion, but this bill was interpreted by the crowd as a way to make the passage of an act of union easier. Although on 22 November, Speaker John Ponsonby assured the crowd assembled around the parliament that a union was not being contemplated, this crowd had been betrayed before by the settlement of the Money Bill dispute, and was not, it thought, to be fooled this time. The Dublin Castle administration actually placed a newspaper advertisement declaring that there was no union on the cards – directly appealing to the politicised crowd through the most popular medium of political discussion – but this did not calm the multitude which continued to congregate outside the parliament. Instead of dispersing, the crowd built a gallows, possibly with the intention of actually hanging Rigby. Because of the noisy and increasingly dangerous gathering outside parliament, the introduction of the bill was cancelled. The disturbance, however, continued; it lasted two days and had to be brought to a close by the deployment of the military. Indeed, so disturbing was the riot that Rigby pushed for the introduction of a riot bill, and the heads of such a bill were introduced and passed the House of Commons but were later dropped (a riot act was not passed in Ireland until 1787).

What actually happened during the riot is unclear, but certainly a number of members of both houses of parliament were verbally and physically abused by the crowd, and several were terrified for their lives. Many of them were struck as they tried to enter the house, and others were forced to swear oaths of loyalty to the country and against a union. Hercules Langford Rowley, MP for County Londonderry, was, despite his muscular name, dragged down a street in humiliation. According to Horace Walpole, some of the mob actually entered the parliament building itself and put an old woman on the throne – suggesting the masculinity of the undertakers was in serious question. The woman on
the throne may also have been an unsubtle reference to Primate George Stone, Archbishop of Armagh, one of the major court figures in 1750s Ireland. Stone was suspected of engaging in sodomitical activity and was an open target for satire in the pamphlet press. Although Walpole claims that there were a number of fatalities incurred by the rioters during the quelling of the riots, Sean Murphy has examined contemporary sources carefully and concluded that Walpole must have been mistaken.22

During the riot, and in a number of pamphlet responses to the riot, discussion of Irish political equality and rights was once again central, and this deeply irritated some of the more conservative sectors of the Irish Anglican enclave. One pseudonymous pamphlet, A short but true account of the rise, progress and happy suppression of several late insurrections . . . in Ireland (1760), complained bitterly that in Dublin ‘you might hear the lowest tradesmen call themselves free citizens with more than Roman arrogance’.23 The leadership of the riot that took place on 3 December is difficult to ascertain (though Patriot politicians undoubtedly had some hand in it, given that most of them went unmolested while other politicians were forced to swear publicly that no union would be implemented). The riot demonstrated plainly that Irish Anglicans were now prepared to use violence if necessary to thwart implementation of a policy to which they were opposed.

That the anti-union riot of 1759 is connected to the political divisions opened up (and never healed) by the Money Bill dispute of the early 1750s is very clear, and Irish Anglican patriotism was the basic principle behind the crowd’s activities. The Chief Secretary, Rigby, emphasised this when he argued that the real people to blame were Patriot politicians who had used the population in order to push its policies through parliament:

For many years, the mob in this kingdom has been wickedly and infamously made use of, by different parties, as an engine to carry questions in parliament, by terrifying the members; and I know of a certainty that expressions have dropped this very session even from members of parliament, that since they had no chance for numbers in the House, they must have recourse to the old method of numbers without doors.24

Given the progress of the Seven Years War with France, many British politicians were reluctant to blame Irish Anglicans, and saw Jacobite spectres, Catholic plots and a potential French invasion lying behind the riotous behaviour of the Dublin populace. British politicians often failed to register that the Irish Anglican enclave was now irrevocably split between patriot and conservative court factions, and also they did not really believe that the patriot calls were more than simply rhetorical
shots across the bow. De facto Prime Minister Pitt was convinced that the ‘practices of papists and emissaries of France’ had been closely concerned with the start of the Dublin riot and he did not accept that Presbyterian weavers of the Liberties had been the main participants.\(^{25}\) Pitt maintained this stance despite the warnings of Rigby that Catholics had probably little to do with the riot. Sir Robert Wilmot, the Lord Lieutenant’s London secretary, also insisted that Catholics were to blame, wondering whether those who believed otherwise had ‘embarrassed’ themselves ‘by representing that popery had no hand in the disturbances of the third of December . . . French incendiaries paced these simple wretches in the front of the battle and sheltered their own creatures in the rear’.\(^{26}\) For these figures, the Catholic and Continental menace had not yet been banished.

The anti-union riot was an unambiguous indication that Ireland, and the Irish public (or at least, the Protestant section of it – though it would be unwise to restrict the politicisation to them alone), had become radicalised, even more so than during the controversy over Wood’s Halfpence in the 1720s. Moreover, unlike the brief but intense spurt of widespread political interest displayed by Irish Anglicans in the 1720s, this time the population would remain radicalised. This radicalism was expressed through a greater interest in national politics, an interest which would eventually culminate in the emergence of the ‘Patriot Party’ under Henry Flood. As a version of patriotism took hold of elite sections of the ruling class, it also filtered down to the literate and even the illiterate Anglican public. When the settlement of the Money Bill dispute became widely known, for example, the Dublin crowd was enraged and about 1,000 congregated in College Green and burned an effigy of the Speaker of the House of Commons – a warning to those ‘patriot’ politicians who had appeared to have been bought up by the Castle in negotiations, their patriotism revealed as a veil for highly personal venality. Allegory and ‘fictive’ representations of current affairs were central elements of the cultural life of the newly energised patriot population.

The Gaelic poets placed their hopes in the restoration of the old order, the ‘return’ of the Pretender, the revival of a Catholic state. Irish Anglican Patriots used some of the same imagery as their Catholic compatriots. Both communities invested heavily in allegorising intimate, sexual and conjugal relationships as a means of discussing the politics (especially Anglo-Irish relations) of the day. However, Irish Anglican patriot dreams were, of course, very different from those of the Gaelic poets. They wished for a parliament completely in their own control, a continuation of a connection to Britain through the monarch but autonomy within the empire. They essentially wanted a marriage, not
between a female Ireland and the British king, but a female Ireland and the Irish Anglican nation. In the context of a very visceral debate in and about Ireland’s independence, in which marriage, seduction, coercion and abduction are common metaphors employed to discuss political union, it is strange that novels published in Ireland in the 1760s have not been examined as occluded contributions to, or interventions in, such debates. Although the term ‘allegory’ would certainly be misapplied if used in a straightforward way about popular romances written and published in mid-century Ireland, these are narratives deeply invested in a language of intimacy and desire highly politicised at the time, and certainly ‘symbolically spread’ to comment on politics and social changes. Let me now turn to one of these popular romances, the novel also considered the ‘first’ of a new genre, the Gothic novel.

\[\text{II}\]

The Adventures of Miss Sophia Berkley is an anonymous novel of romance and marriage published in Dublin in 1760, just a few months after the riotous response to rumours of union – rumours often articulated in terms of marriage and sexual congress – and it would surely require a stretch of the imagination to believe that it is not in some way implicated in this debate. Allegory is, again, the wrong word for the popular fiction published in Ireland in this period, but by employing the same language and tropes as political pamphleteers and Gaelic poets, romantic novels certainly ‘symbolically spread’ beyond the details of their repetitious plots and, to a population trained to see analogies for the politics of the nation everywhere they looked, love stories were coded commentaries on political realities.

Placing The Adventures of Miss Sophia Berkley in the allegory-saturated context of Irish political debate of the mid-eighteenth century is the best way to understand how it can (should?) be read as a text deeply concerned with making meaning for its readership and providing a way in which sense could be salvaged out of the rhetorical chaos persisting in a Dublin political arena. This is not to say that reading the novel politically is the only legitimate response for a critic, or to suggest that affect should be ignored. However, cutting this novel off from the white heat of political debate in which it was first launched would be seriously misleading. Moreover, as an epistolary novel, it is always already implicated in politics. Although obviously influenced by masterpieces like Samuel Richardson’s Pamela (1740) and Clarissa (1748), which deal with the history of a woman and her love plot
(successful or tragic), it is important to remember that this romantic tradition existed alongside a much more explicitly political epistolary tradition which included Letters Written by a Turkish Spy (1687–94), Montesquieu’s Lettres Persanes (1721) and Oliver Goldsmith’s Letters from a Citizen of the World (1762). Rather than seeing these traditions existing separately, though, perhaps it would be better to consider them as cross-contaminating, although as Ruth Perry has argued, the political spy letter did give way to the love letter novel through the course of the century.27

In his analysis of epistolary culture in eighteenth-century Germany, Simon Richter concluded that ‘any effort to draw clean lines separating public, private, and intimate spheres, virtual or real, must fail’.28 As Mary A. Favret argues, ‘The cabalistic quality of intimate correspondence in the political works persisted both in the epistolary novel and in popular imagination, although it often remained hidden beneath the dynamics of ‘romance’ . . . sexual intrigue becomes a metaphor for political intrigue’.29

Moreover, if The Adventures of Miss Sophia Berkley is to be considered as a partial commentary on the politics of mid-century Ireland, its anonymous status is hardly surprising, given that, as James Kelly has explained, ‘most entrants into the public sphere’ during and after the Money Bill dispute, ‘chose to occlude their identity by publishing their sentiments anonymously’.30 Far too much emphasis has been placed on the way novels relate to each other in literary history and not enough, as Paul Hunter has demonstrated, on the way novels borrow from, depend upon, other genres, including political pamphlets, travel narratives and poetry, a point emphasised as well by Harriet Guest who argues that novels ‘participate in debates that cut across genres; they assume readers who are also immersed in periodical literature, in poetry, in histories, readers who discuss plays and parliamentary debates, who perform music, and peer into the windows of the print shops’.31 Retrospective attempts to insist on a clear distinction between fiction and fact when looking at eighteenth-century literature are, as Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook emphasises, ‘anachronistic’,32 especially given that fictional letters, such as those by Pamela, posed as genuine letters, and therefore purposefully blurred such distinctions anyway.

The anonymity of Sophia Berkley, and the unnamed editor’s claims of having ‘discovered’ these letters in the papers of a deceased friend, does lend a sense of authenticity to the novel. Moreover, in the ‘pamphlet war’ generated by the Money Bill dispute, many of the pamphlets took the form of anonymous or pseudonymous epistles, sometimes even between allegorical female figures, such as The P**** Vindicated, and
the Affairs of I-----d Set in a true Light, in a Letter from The Honourable Hellen O’Roon, to the Right Honourable Lady Viscountess **** in London (1754), which describes England as a ‘Mother-Sister-Country’;33 The Conduct of a Certain Member of Parliament During the Last Session; and the Motives on which he acted; Explain’d in a Letter to a Friend (Dublin, 1755); and A Letter from Dionysius, to the Renowned Triumvirate (1754). The provenance of The Adventures of Miss Sophia Berkley is rather more difficult to discern when placed in this context.

For Mary A. Favret, there was always a political force to the epistolary novel, a political force latent until the 1790s when it was made manifest in the aftermath of the polemical debate waged in the form of letters between Edmund Burke in Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790) and Thomas Paine’s The Rights of Man (1791–2) and the foundation of the London Correspondence Society in 1792. Letters made public through publication indicate the relationship between the private and the public long before the notion of the personal as political became a popular slogan.34 In its investment in the language of sexual intimacy, love, marriage, rape and abduction, Sophia Berkley revisits the material that formed the basis for many allegorical versions of Ireland in Gaelic poetry, Swift’s Injured Lady and the pamphlets that followed the Money Bill dispute and the anti-union riot, and this also suggests that the novel needs to be read with these contexts in mind. As Heckdendorn Cook has established, ‘the eighteenth-century letter-novel was never not political’.35

My main argument about The Adventures of Miss Sophia Berkley is that its plot of sexual intrigue ‘symbolically spreads’ from the actual events of the plot to cover the politics of the day, and does so from a particular political perspective: that of the Irish Anglican Patriots. At this stage, the Irish Anglican literate public felt betrayed by the supposedly patriotic politicians in whom they had placed their faith during the Money Bill dispute and who they then mocked so powerfully during the anti-union riot. For this reading public, union was not marriage but unnatural congress, incest and rape; like the Ireland of the aisling poems, the patriot crowd waited the return of the true lover who could rescue them all from the depredations of the foreign, perverted abductor who wanted to force a union, and this true lover was the genuine patriot politician who had been so mistakenly lionised during the start of the Money Bill dispute as Ireland’s real saviour. The issue of what kind of fiction Irish Anglicans were reading is very important in this context, especially if it uses the same tropes and characters as are prevalent in the political culture.
The Adventures of Miss Sophia Berkley, written by ‘a young Lady’ and published by James Hoey, is one of the most important neglected texts in Irish literary history. If the categorisation of Rolf Loeber and Magda Loeber is correct, not only is this the ‘first’ ‘Irish Gothic’ novel but, given that it pre-dates Horace Walpole’s The Castle of Otranto (1764) by four years, it may also have a claim to be the ‘first’ Gothic novel. It is important to pause here, of course, and repeat the warnings given in the Introduction against searching for the ‘ur’ text of any genre, an exercise not only pointless but, in fact, damaging. As has been pointed out, the notion that Walpole’s novel is the point of origin of the Gothic genre is a complete misunderstanding of how literary history works. Anne Williams insists that the idea that Otranto ‘sprang fully armed from Horace Walpole’s dreaming brow in 1764’ is a Gothic myth of origins, and one that, for example, marginalizes female writers by establishing a kind of primogeniture mirrored by its thematic centrality in much Gothic fiction itself.

With the publication of Sophia Berkley we have, if not a point of origin, certainly a significant moment, and it is worth pausing here to explain what we know about this novel and to suggest in what ways it can be seen as a Gothic novel at all. We actually know very little. I have located no contemporary reviews, no advertisements for the novel, it is unaccompanied by a subscription list, and Christina Morin counts it among the ‘forgotten’, having ‘disappeared’ from the cultural memory of British and Irish Gothic fiction.37 Indeed, the novel is apparently so easy to forget that the Loebers, having been the first to rediscover the novel, promptly forgot it again, and it does not appear in their extraordinary Guide. The author is unknown, identified only as a ‘young Lady’ on the title page, though this presumably refers to Sophia herself, whose letters to a friend Constantia (mysteriously absent from the actual story itself, given her apparent closeness to Sophia) form the body of the novel, which is introduced by an unnamed editor who has supposedly found these letters in the papers left by a ‘deceased friend’ (2), (also unnamed – though presumably not Constantia, as the editor would surely otherwise have mentioned this).

For an eighteenth-century Gothic novel, the plot is relatively simple. Just before her marriage to the rich and cultured Horatio, our heroine, Sophia Berkley, is left bereft when he is apparently killed by pirates on the British coast. When her father dies very soon after this and leaves her destitute, Sophia goes to London to earn her living as a partner in a millinery firm. Unfortunately, her beauty enflames the depraved desires of Castilio, who, having been rebuffed, demonstrates he can’t take no for an answer. He kidnaps Sophia and imprisons her in his mansion, where
he attempts to convince her to willingly become his lover or suffer the consequences. Luckily, Sophia manages to escape from the mansion by picking a hole in one of its walls, *Escape from Alcatraz* style, and returns to London, where she is almost captured again by Castilio’s associates, saved only by the intervention of the rich and kind Dorimont, who also (and immediately) falls in love with her. Sophia, however, is a one-man woman and insists she can never recover from the loss of her Horatio – given which declaration, she is fortunate indeed when the supposed corpse turns up on her doorstep, very much alive and insisting that rumours of his death were exaggerated.

It transpires that Horatio has been having adventures of his own. Kidnapped, not killed, by the murderous pirates and carried to Algiers, where he was kept prisoner, he built a getaway boat and escaped with a number of other prisoners only to be shipwrecked on a deserted island (rather like Sycorax, Caliban’s mother in *The Tempest* [1623]). Horatio was then rescued by a French aristocrat, the Marquis de Bellville, who quickly became his best friend, took him to France to meet his family and then tried to convince him to marry his sister, who had fallen in love with him. Unfortunately, the hot-headed Marquis was enraged when Horatio refused to marry Mademoiselle de Bellville (it seems that Horatio was also hung up on his first love) and forced him to take part in a duel. In the fight the Marquis was killed. Horatio’s loyalty to the dead Marquis was such that he was extremely reluctant to reveal the reasons why they fought, and he was prepared for execution by guillotine. Literally on the chopping block, Horatio was saved once again, this time by Mademoiselle de Bellville, disguised as a man. So deeply in love with Horatio was she that she was willing to give her life for him, claimed that she was, in fact, the killer of the Marquis and that Horatio was covering for his/her crime. Having both been sent off for execution by the French king who had grown irritated with the farce being played out with his criminal justice system, they were saved when her mask fell off and her identity was revealed. The king, and her father, were so touched by the self-sacrifices both parties have been willing to make that Horatio and Mademoiselle de Bellville were forgiven. Horatio then returned to England to be reunited with his beloved Sophia.

Understandably, given this plot, there have been objections to the description of Sophia Berkley as a Gothic novel. Maurice Levy has influentially deplored the apparent expansion of the term ‘Gothic’ so that ‘each component of the notion becomes in itself sufficient justification for using the whole concept’, an expansion that results in Gothic becoming the equivalent of ‘non-realistic’. I wouldn’t share Levy’s general concerns with policing the term ‘Gothic’, though I certainly wouldn’t...
use it to incorporate everything non-realist. However, even for Levy, *Sophia Berkley* would surely be at least a candidate for inclusion, since he admits that the term ‘conjures up’ for him, ‘female innocence engaged in labyrinthine pursuits and threatened by monachal or baronial lubricity’, although admittedly there are no ‘ruined castles and abbeys’ to be found here.\textsuperscript{40} More specifically, Richard Haslam has asked, using Levy as a starting point, that we ‘reduce the critical temptation to make “Gothic”’ mean practically everything, asking pointedly, ‘What does it mean to label . . . *The Adventures of Miss Sophia Berkley* (1760) “Irish Gothic” when [it was] published before the mode’s generally accepted *terminus a quo* – Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764)?’\textsuperscript{41} The answer to this specific question is not really very difficult: it means that *Otranto*’s claims to startling originality will have to be tempered a bit, no bad thing given the novel’s inflated sense of its own importance. The idea that *Otranto* sets the limits to the genre is to take Walpole rather more seriously than he took himself. The answer to generic complexity is not to close down the porous borders – particularly not of a term like Gothic which has undergone a number of mutations in its relatively long history.

*Sophia Berkley* is certainly not straightforwardly a ‘Gothic’ novel in the way that Walpole’s is, not least because the term Gothic is not used by it as a self-description (it does not have that disquieting sub-title, *A Gothic Story*). It also lacks the medieval setting that was the most basic meaning of the term when used by Walpole (which helps to explain why *Longsword* [1764] is a much more self-evident addition to the genre), and is a novel set in contemporary England. However, *Sophia Berkley* combines a number of elements which *would* become basic to the genre: a long Catholic Continental interlude; an emphasis on horror and terror; the abduction of a virginal girl followed by numerous (and serious) threats of rape and murder by an older, aristocratic and sexually dissolute male; images of death and torture; scenes of confinement and entrapment; an overall sense of persecution and paranoia that runs throughout the novel and adheres to both the main characters, Sophia herself, and her lover Horatio. This last element is extremely important because an atmosphere of persecution is one for which the Gothic novel later became famous, especially in novels like William Godwin’s *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) and James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). As in these novels, the characters in *Sophia Berkley* are sometimes persecuted for clear reasons (Castilio’s sexual desire being the most obvious), but more often they suffer for reasons unknown and unknowable that expand outward and make it appear, at times, as if
they are living in a hostile and threatening universe pitted against them. As Sophia herself puts it, ‘I considered that everybody around me was in the plot against me’ (56).

Both Sophia and Horatio sometimes appear caught up in an incomprehensible web which conspires to keep them apart, so that letters mysteriously go missing or unanswered, parent figures die without warning (one kindly mother dispatched by an unlucky kick to the face by a cow) and even apparently inconsequential bits of paper come back to haunt Sophia with a signature she doesn’t remember making. Moreover, these moments of existential and even cosmic paranoia and crisis force the characters to attempt to decipher the meaning of their own lives and the world into which they have been thrown – in other words, this is a novel that does indeed ‘mean’, and whose meaning ‘symbolically spreads’ well beyond its pages to address very seriously the concerns of the public who first read it, the rioting, unsettled, existentially distressed, paranoid and persecuted Irish Anglicans who, like Sophia, felt betrayed and threatened, and whose reading habits often led them to fictional representations of their plight in the pamphlet literature of the day. Moreover, it also demonstrates that although one of the important aspects of Gothic is indeed its affective qualities, its ability to incite dread and fear in the characters and the readers, the response of the characters to that dread and fear here is to try to seek meaning, or to remake it cognitively, in the face of existential terror. Meaning and feeling are not separate and unrelated categories in the Gothic; instead, the latter provokes a search for the former.

The implication of the novel in the political discourse of the 1750s is not difficult to demonstrate. As patriotism became a significant discourse in Irish Anglican political life, patriots became obsessed with discussing the Irish situation relative to Britain by utilising the language of freedom and slavery. By the late 1750s, the discourse of liberty and opposition to slavery had a respectable patriotic history in Irish Anglican writing, beginning with William Molyneux’s *Case* (1698) arguing ‘that Ireland should be Bound by Acts of Parliament made in England is against Reason, and the Common Rights for all Mankind’. The analogy made by Molyneux here is between the (Irish Anglican) nation and the free individual: just as an individual citizen has the right to self-determination so too has an individual nation, and any usurpation of that right by a foreign parliament is basically an act of enslavement. Archbishop William King too warned that ‘the mischiefs of tamely submitting to the tyranny and usurpation of a Governor may be worse and have more dangerous consequences to the Commonwealth, than a War’. In the third *Drapier’s Letter* (1724), Swift pointedly asked, ‘were not the People of Ireland born as free as those of England?
... Am I a Free-man in England, and do I become a Slave in six Hours, by crossing the Channel?44 Opposition to Irish slavery is a persistent theme in Swift’s work, and in A Short Character (1710) he attacks the Earl of Wharton, accusing him of ‘finishing the Slavery of that People, as if it were gaining a mighty Point to the Advantage of England’.45 Swift’s feelings were echoed by the contrarian Charles Lucas, who in 1748 described as ‘of slavish and corrupt stamp’ Irish parliaments which allowed English MPs to ‘impose’ laws on Ireland,46 and declared (rather proudly) ‘I disdain the Thought of representing a People, who dare not be free’.47 For Lucas, as for Molyneux and Swift, ‘LIBERTY . . . the best Gift of Heaven, is your [Irish Anglican] inheritance’, but this inheritance was under threat from those within the Irish Anglican nation who would simply give up this natural right.48

Importantly, those who attempted to take away these supposedly natural rights by ‘selling out’ to the British parliament (that is, the supposed Patriots like Boyle who had resolved the Money Bill dispute apparently to their own advantage) were excoriated in an anonymous pamphlet (probably by Henry Brooke), Liberty and Common-Sense to the People of Ireland, Greeting (1759):

Wherefore, when we elect Persons to represent Us in Parliament, we must not be supposed to depart from the smallest Right which we have deposited with them. We make a Lodgement, not a Gift . . . And, were it possible that They should attempt to destroy the Constitution which We had appointed them to maintain, They can no more be held in the Rank of our Representatives, than a Factor, turned Pirate, can continue to be called the Factor of those Merchants whose Goods he had plundered.49

Given the centrality of the dichotomy between freedom and slavery in Irish patriotic discourse in this period, that a significant portion of The Adventures of Miss Sophia Berkley is taken up with Horatio’s peons to freedom and his disparagement of those who would give up their liberty without a fight to foreign despots would seem to suggest a conscious and deliberate discursive connection between it and what has been called ‘colonial nationalism’.50 Like the Irish Anglican nation, Horatio too must also resolve an identity crisis, and this resolution is articulated in terms of his refusal to be treated like a slave – the exact language being used by Irish Anglican ‘colonial nationalists’ trying to explain the reasons for their refusal to accept a union with Great Britain. After he is abducted by a gang of pirates, Horatio is informed that his captor, the ‘inhuman Rodolpho’ (113), intends to keep him as a slave for the rest of his life ‘and that no ransom, however great, should purchase [his] liberty’ (112). Horatio insists that he would rather commit suicide
than remain in service, since death is preferable to slavery (114). What disgusts him most, however, is the fact that some of those with whom he is trapped appear resigned to life in servitude, and in despair he asks ‘how they could bear life under such unmanly usage’ (114). Some, he finds, ‘preferred even a miserable existence to death; and would rather have languished their days in the most abject slavery, than perish in a moment’ (117). Such an option is anathema to Horatio, who – like Charles Lucas – chooses to risk his life than remain quiescent in the face of tyranny. In other words, Horatio talks a lot like an Irish Anglican Patriot and this is hardly a coincidence in a novel published after a decade when the language of patriotism was pouring from the presses in political pamphlets, satires, allegories. In eventually marrying him (and resisting the seduction of the villain), Sophia unites with a figure whose symbolic significance spreads over the class from which the author of the novel itself most probably came.

Horatio’s determination to escape slavery leads to a dramatic escape on a raft which is then wrecked, causing him to be ‘thrown upon a small island’ (118). The shipwreck had long been a conventional way to image the supposed collapse of the Gaelic world in the face of the Jacobite defeat, perhaps most memorably by Dáithí Ó Brudair in ‘An Longbhriseadh’, or ‘The Shipwreck’. Horatio’s island is ‘a desert one’, ‘totally uninhabited’ (119, 118), a highly significant plot twist coming in the same century as Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which, as many critics have argued, is essentially a story about identity and subjectivity. In her examination of island literature, Diana Loxley argues that *Robinson Crusoe* was a central text in the formation of the modern individual, and the Crusoe figure on the deserted island became a paradigmatic example of the human subject coming to existential awareness. Deserted islands, particularly, are spaces where ideas of origin and identity can be pondered in a kind of Utopian space, ‘the site of that contemplation being the uninhabited territory upon which the conditions for a rebirth or genesis are made possible’ and where the individual can go through a process of ‘reformulation and renewal’. Having felt abandoned by a metaphorical parent – the Big Daddy England – Irish Anglicans too had to go through a dramatic process of rebirth and reconstitution – only, the island on which this rebirth took place was far from uninhabited, and was rather populated by extreme expressions of otherness, Irish Catholics. Horatio uses his deserted island to demonstrate that he is not going to be treated as a slave, and it is where he begins the process of becoming a man, effectively starting from scratch, and – shockingly for a mid-eighteenth-century Irish Anglican publication – is assisted by a French aristocrat.
The emphasis on French benevolence is perhaps the most surprising element of the novel and, given the Francophobia prevalent in the 1750s, would have surely worried contemporary readers. Britain and France had been at war since 1756, and rumours of a French invasion of Ireland had been rife for about a decade. Even before the Seven Years War broke out there had been invasion scares in Ireland, and in April 1755 there were rumours abounding that the French had actually landed in the west of Ireland.53 These fears were increased during 1759, when the increased build-up of the French navy led by Jacobites encouraged leading British politicians to consider that Ireland would be subject to a French incursion. Indeed, even the anti-union riot was blamed on French spies by the British Prime Minister,54 and by making the French wholly and genuinely sympathetic here, the author of *Sophia Berkley* dangerously shifts her novel, indeed radicalises it so that it is not simply patriotic but seems prepared to continue all manner of alliance in order to ensure that its characters do not have to endure a life of slavery. The implication of this for the Anglican readership is that it too may have to consider new alliances (perhaps with the reviled Catholic majority) in order to avoid being subjected to the political servitude of which so many of them were terrified.

This radicalisation would also help explain the very sympathetic treatment of Roman Catholics in the novel as a whole. Sophia’s best friend as a girl is Isabella, a Catholic, who is presented as morally incorruptible and extraordinarily loyal, given that she falls in love with Horatio first yet graciously steps aside to allow Sophia to marry him without guilt. She is depicted as a kind, considerate and extremely self-sacrificing girl, prepared to give up her own happiness to secure that of her closest friend, and although Sophia articulates the common anti-Catholic distaste for the institutional church, describing Catholicism as a ‘religion which, as it addresses itself to the passions of mankind, can never choose a better opportunity of taking possession of the mind, than when it is weakened by grief’ (11), this rhetoric does not spill over into a denigration of any particular Catholic in the novel at all. Individual Catholics are good and even heroic.

In one sense it is not surprising that patriotic literature could sometimes articulate a measure of sympathy towards Irish Catholics since Irish Anglicans felt that they now occupied a similar position to the previously reviled Other. If the Irish Anglican enclave felt surrounded by a nefarious Catholic population and abandoned by the English, then individual Irish Anglican Patriots felt even more isolated, fighting against a corrupt political system operating through graft and self-interest. Periodicals such as the *Universal Advertiser* ‘popularised the sense of
The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction

a black-and-white political firmament, filled by virtuous patriots struggling against a venal Castle administration, corrupt placement, and an English ministry intent on further subjugating the Irish parliament and draining the Irish treasury for non-Irish purposes.55 In this kind of atmosphere, Catholics could be seen as potential allies rather than default enemies. Taking into account the toleration extended towards Catholics in the novel, the sympathetic representation of France, the hero’s defence of liberty and freedom and his attack on the ‘enslaved mentality’ of those who would submit to tyrannical rule, the implication of the novel in the patriotic politics of the 1750s is difficult to dispute.

This relatively benign version of Catholics and Catholicism was not maintained later in the Irish Gothic novel. Anne Fuller’s The Convent, Or the History of Sophia Nelson (1786), for example, recycles quite a scandalous version of the Church for its readership. In a plot which, as Christina Morin has pointed out, anticipates Le Fanu’s Uncle Silas,56 an orphaned girl (Sophia Nelson) is singled out for marriage to her first cousin Dick by his nefarious father, her uncle Woodville. Sophia is imprisoned in a French convent where – rather like Lucy Snowe in Charlotte Bronte’s Villette (1853) – she finds her Protestantism under natural and supernatural pressure as great efforts are made to convince her to renounce her faith and convert. Like Lucy, Sophia’s national status as a ‘British subject’ (and therefore by implication, naturally Protestant and free) is what saves her from conversion, although significantly, again like Lucy, she is attracted to Catholicism as well as revolted by it. Although Sophia Berkley clearly regrets the loss of Isabella to a French convent and considers Catholicism as theologically dodgy, it does not indulge in delusions about Catholic plots that abound in the later Gothic novel.

III

The plot of The Adventures of Miss Sophia Berkley charts what will become a commonplace course for later Irish national novels: projected (happy) marriage disrupted by Gothic disasters such as the horrific attack on Horatio which causes all the trouble, followed by the constant and improbable plot coincidences which keep the loving couple separated, especially Sophia’s abduction by a perverted villain and imprisonment in an aristocratic mansion. The novel never really reaches the ‘schizophrenic’ levels traced by Kate Trumpener in her analysis of the national tales of the 1810s (as the historical novel begins to take shape), a schizophrenia which disrupts the closed Burkean family dynamics which links
harmonious marriages to harmonious national politics in the genre.\textsuperscript{57} However, \textit{Sophia Berkley} certainly prefigures this schizophrenia in the near-hysteria to which the heroine is constantly reduced by the early events of the novel. Indeed, Sophia is prone to a heightened and excessive sentimentality at the start of the novel, is often to be found in tears and is easily manipulated by nefarious enemies because of her emotional fragility. However, eventually Sophia demonstrates that she is a plucky figure able to withstand a great deal of physical and psychological stress and strain – unlike, say, Swift’s \textit{Injured Lady}.

In later novels, the Gothic marriage plot, or the abduction plot, causes its heroine to go mad or to behave increasingly irrationally, and sometimes madness results from any attempt on the heroine’s virtue. Female madness is a significant feature of the Gothic genre as a whole, prominent examples of which are the imprisoned Agnes in Matthew Lewis’s \textit{The Monk} (1796), Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë’s \textit{Jane Eyre} (1847) and the heroine of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s ‘\textit{The Yellow Wallpaper}’ (1892). However, here, Sophia starts off as a very fragile and vulnerable figure who is easily disturbed psychologically, but by the time of her abduction by Castilio she has become a robust and powerful woman who is able to pull a wall to bits to escape from her abductor, climb and leap down from large walls, walk incredible distances and resist even the overtures of a good man to maintain loyalty to her first love. This is a novel, in other words, which has little time for the kind of weakness displayed by the Injured Lady, who can’t make up her own mind and needs advice. Sophia, too, writes letters, but only to inform Constantia of what she has already decided to do.

Although appealing to the language of sensibility at the start of the novel, Sophia quickly becomes convinced of the dangers of both appearing emotionally weak and succumbing to emotional convulsions, and even in her love life she is guided by reason rather than reaction, having learned the lesson of her mother who was, it seems, too much led by her feelings. With her parents, ‘their affection for each other did not allow them to consult the rules of prudence’ (8), and they stupidly eloped, after which Sophie’s grandfather wrote his daughter out of his will and refused to ‘soften’ in his resolution against the marriage (8). He may have been right to oppose the marriage because Sophia’s father turns out to be a disaster when it comes to economic management; the family soon finds itself in financial difficulties, and by the time he dies, his estate is heavily indebted. Before his death, Sophia’s father admits, ‘I am justly punished for my extravagance!’ (38). It is notable that Sophia’s choice in marriage is rich enough to ensure her future happiness. Horatio has an estate of his own nearby and ‘my lover’s rank, person and fortune,
The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction

gave him a sufficient title to any woman’ (19). Sophia recognises that ‘the only obstacle . . . was my friendship for Isabella’ (19), who had fallen for Horatio first, but in proper rational fashion, she overcomes her concerns about this prior attachment. Sophia accuses herself of being ‘guilty of the most unpardonable breach of friendship’, which leaves her ‘ashamed and confused’ (16), though, notably, not prepared to actually give up Horatio. Although Sophia counts herself as carrying exalted ideas of female friendship, she admits that Isabella, in her self-sacrificing behaviour, ‘went beyond’ her (19). The emotions take second place to Sophia’s reasonable and calculated assessment of her future prospects and her obvious determination to avoid the mistakes made by her own mother.

What all this indicates is that Sophia is driven more by prudence and rationality than by susceptibility to emotional breakdown. Indeed, she constantly shows she is stronger than those who surround her, including her father. While he goes into ‘violent’ convulsions brought on by his distress over Horatio’s apparent death, she, despite being left destitute by events and feeling that the ‘whole universe is indifferent’ to her (36), holds up well. Another character, Mrs Williams, insists that ‘the true philosophy of soul . . . consists in governing the passions; not in superciliously pretending to be without them’ (47), and Sophia seems to have taken this to heart. Avoiding the madness suffered by her Gothic inheritors, Sophia maintains both her virtue – and her sanity. She is much stronger than the reader is led to believe at the start, and she demonstrates this strength in a number of ways.

Moreover, like her fiancé, Sophia is rather addicted to the language of liberty and slavery, and she is willing to commit suicide rather than submit to the sexual tyranny of Castilio. It is clearly tempting to the destitute Sophia to yield to Castilio’s seduction. He promises her an easy life and shows that many other women have succumbed to his charms. Like her true lover, Horatio, Sophia recognises that this would be to accede to slavery. Were she to submit to the abduction and rape then she would be reduced to chattel status and would have submitted to an act of pathological violence (pathological given that her abductor seems to make a habit of it). Sophia, however, does not submit, and indeed will not be bribed or cajoled into a sexual relationship outside that with her one true love. Unlike the Injured Lady, who was talked into pre-marital sex, Sophia sees through the excessive rhetoric of her would be lover, and stays faithful. Like the gentleman who managed to secure the Injured Lady’s submission, Castilio talks about love and marriage quite a lot. However, the hollowness of the rhetoric of marriage and union is completely exposed during the discussions between Sophia and Castilio and Sophia and Fidelia.
Castilio at first maintains a fiction that he intends to marry Sophia and that he will legitimate their sexual relationship once he has had his way with her. He later admits that he really just wants her as his mistress, to make sure he has constant access to her body, but he does concede to her clear distress that she can pretend that she is his wife if she really wants to: ‘if you will consent to make me happy, my whole fortune shall be your’s; if you desire it you shall take my name and appear to the world as my wife; can I do more?’ (73). Castilio certainly tells others that Sophia is his wife in order to allow him to get away with abducting her (as Fidelia first tells her, ‘I thought you had been his wife!’ 57), and, bizarrely, he tells her that she will ‘meet with nothing but the strictest honour’ from him (58). In these scenes, the language of love and marriage is exposed as merely a rhetorical disguise for force and rape, and Castilio’s outward appearance as an honest gentleman is shown in fact to be the disguise of a monster. Sophia at one stage protests about ‘the horror he inspired me with’ (67) and explains how ‘he was deaf to everything but his own brutal appetites’ (74). If Swift rather played down the more horrific elements of the partial seduction, partial rape of the Injured Lady, the author of Sophia Berkley effectively Gothicises Swift’s plot and highlights the full misery of the abduction, threats and near-rape of the dependent female once she has no male to turn to for help.

Like Swift’s gentleman, Castilio, then, talks of marriage and being honest, and for both this is nothing but a melodramatic ploy to ensure sexual satisfaction. Sophia does not fall for such nonsense but sees behind it to the naked power of the aristocratic male and determines to do something about it. Pretending that Sophia is his wife is the way Castilio covers up for his intended crime of rape. The novel works very hard to expose the language of marriage and love as a cover for abuse. Anglican Patriots too had seen through the metaphor of marriage in the discussion of a political union. In Patriot Queries, Occasioned by a Late Libel, Entitled, Queries to the People of Ireland; to which is added, A Letter to the Author of Them, by Another Hand ([1754]), the unidentified author asks of Primate George Stone, a proponent of political union, ‘whether if . . . [he] had been suffered to go on for a while in his own way, he would not have destroyed all the private Virtue we have among us, and unpeopled the Nation, by substituting something else in the Place of Wedlock’. That ‘something else’ is clearly an illegitimate sexual relationship, rather like the one proposed to Sophia by Castilio, something that looks to the outside world like a marriage but which both parties to the contract know is actually a fiction based on threat and a misuse of power. Likewise, Liberty and Common-Sense to the People of Ireland, Greeting (1760) (probably by Henry Brooke) insists
that for all the rhetoric of political union as marriage everyone knows that no true marriage can take place between Ireland and Great Britain: ‘When a Marriage is proposed between Nations, Princes, or Potentates, the Advance is always made from the Stronger to the Weaker; from the Greater to the Less; for, otherwise, Contempt and Refusal might evidently ensue. But when did England address Ireland on this subject?’ 59

Though the writer of this pamphlet is appalled by the riots against the union, he is also completely opposed to the notion of a union as well and insists that ‘The dreaded UNION cannot possibly be brought to pass. The Parties neither are agreed, nor ever were agreed, nor ever will be agreed, on the said Bands of Matrimony, to the End of Time’ (27).

That Sophia Berkley’s plot of sexual intrigue is to be read as to some extent an intervention in the national question is suggested in many ways. Of course, the language of abduction and rape participates in the kind of discussion about the possible union between Britain and Ireland that caused the 1759 riot in the first place, but more than this, Sophia frames her refusal to submit to Castilio in terms of a withholding of ‘consent’, a politically charged word in Irish politics of the 1750s. For the Irish Anglican Patriots it was consent, or rather the lack of it, which explains Ireland’s treatment by Britain. The term ‘consent’ had been a controversial one during the Money Bill dispute of the 1750s, which was triggered in part by a failure by the Irish House of Commons to agree on whether an acknowledgement of the king’s consent should be accepted as part of a money bill in November 1751. 60

Originally, when the application to use the treasury surplus was made, the term ‘gracious recommendation’ was placed in the preamble to the heads of bill to refer to the king’s review of the request. But, by the time it arrived back in December 1751, the term ‘recommendation’ had been replaced with the much more contentious term ‘consent’, indicating the level of control the British parliament was trying to assert over Irish affairs. The king was ‘consenting’ to the decisions of the Irish parliament, which suggested that consent could just as easily be withheld. Even the Chief Secretary Sackville was surprised by this change, opining that ‘the word consent was not left out accidentally and a debate about the power of the Crown over the surplus of His Majesty’s revenue would not be very eligible.’ 61

More importantly, in the pamphlet war which followed the start of the Money Bill dispute, consent was fetishistically referenced in discussions of national politics in the context of rape, legalised prostitution and abduction. For example, in Common Sense: in a Letter to a Friend (1755), the author complains about his ‘poor, poor Country! formidably attacked from without, betrayed from within, and, at the same Time, pregnant with Swarms who are eager to prostitute, each his Share of
Talents, to the Disguise of the most vital Truths, and Recommendation of the most fatal Measures’, all because of the attempt to pass off ‘previous consent’ as a genuine political truth, ‘a Doctrine, now almost as notorious as Transubstantiation; vindicated by the same Species of Reasoning, with as much Zeal, and pretty equal Success’.

In this context it is understandable why *The Adventures of Miss Sophia Berkley* places such an emphasis on the necessity of obtaining consent in all matters of sexual union, and this emphasis interestingly pushes the novel towards a kind of proto-feminist vindication of women’s right to choose and a colonial nationalist refusal to submit to imperial power. Sophia’s father insists that ‘I will never desire you to marry against your own consent’, and ‘he had taken a resolution never to force my inclinations’ (21), a promise respected by Horatio who announces that ‘he would sooner renounce me for ever, than owe his happiness to any motive but my affection for him, which he flattered himself he might in time deserve, by the truth and delicacy of his love for me’ (22). Swift’s Injured Lady was still desperate for a union to be formalised between herself and the abusive gentleman lover, despite his mistreatment of her. Sophia Berkley, contrariwise, is desperate to extricate herself from the home in which her supposed seducer has imprisoned her – a stance that reflects the political difference between the early and middle years of the eighteenth century, since where union was once desired by Irish Anglicans, it was now being openly and aggressively rejected by Patriots. If political discourse was to constantly resort to the tropes and themes of contemporary fiction then novels too could be one of the ways in which political war could be fought for the future of the Irish Anglican nation.

Sophia learns an important lesson about her abductor very quickly: appealing to his sense of decency will not work. Whereas the Injured Lady’s male correspondent believed that ‘an improvement in Ireland’s fortunes depends on a change of heart in England’, by the time of *Sophia Berkley*, Irish Anglican Patriots had realised that this was a pipe dream and had to be abandoned. Appealing to England’s sense of decency did not work for the Injured Lady; looking to Castilio’s sense of honour fails to work for Sophia and she soon concludes that God helps those who help themselves. Sophia makes her own future rather than wait around for someone to save her. She indeed accepts help from others, but essentially she looks after herself. At times this leads her to behave in ways slightly less than respectable in order to obtain what she wants, but she appears to have learned that being behind about going forward is not the way to ensure her own safety or financial security. In many ways, her female assistant Fidelia is a good example of
where behaving like the Injured Lady will get you. Fidelia’s family are Castilio’s tenants, and after he came across her he became infatuated and determined to possess her sexually. While her father ‘refused at first to comply’ with Castilio’s demands, he eventually capitulated ‘lest Castilio, in whose power he was, should turn him out of his farm’ (61). Castilio did not rape Fidelia but seduced her by promising marriage and then, as soon as they had sex, protested about the impossible situation in which he found himself, as a landlord could not possibly marry the daughter of one of his tenants (62). Sophia avoids the fate of the Injured Lady and fights for her survival in a world that seems pitted against her, maintaining her right to exercise her consent as a necessary precondition for sex and marriage. In this she acts as an example of self-sufficiency and self-authorisation to the initial readers of the novel.

IV

Making meaning, symbolically spreading, the situations in which these characters find themselves resonate with the struggles of identity and self-authorisation the Irish Anglican enclave was also undergoing in the mid-eighteenth century. Although I am suggesting that Sophia is usefully read as in some ways a representation of Ireland, Horatio of Irish Anglican patriotism, and Castilio of English rapacity, this should not be taken to mean that the characters operate in a straightforward allegorical manner. Sophia is not an allegorical Ireland – the meanings with which she is invested symbolically spread out to incorporate Irish national politics and make her a close relation of the Injured Lady and the wronged women of the *aisling*. Similarly, Horatio is not an allegory of the Irish Anglican patriot enclave, but he does speak its language and his story can be read as providing an oblique commentary on Irish Patriot discourse of the mid-eighteenth century. The stories of Sophia, Horatio and Castilio should be read contiguous with the politics of the time and they operate as ways to think through the kinds of political struggles being waged in the period.

Fighting for her own survival, Sophia is one of a long line of protagonists of the eighteenth-century novel who have, essentially, to make their own identities in a hostile world which has left them orphans. In *Adultery in the Novel* (1979), Tony Tanner argues that the eighteenth-century novel often centres on outsiders such as orphans, prostitutes or adventurers who embody and represent the radical experimental status of the novel itself in its beginnings. These social outsiders carry ‘unstabilized energy’ that threatens ‘directly or implicitly, the organisation of
society, whether by the indeterminacy of their origin, the uncertainty of the direction in which they will focus their unbonded energy, or their attitude toward the ties that hold society together and that they may choose to slight or break.64 Emerging from a marginal space, from a kind of orphaned people, Irish Anglicans, a trouble-making group of Patriots rioting in the streets, demanding rights and institutions commensurate with these rights, making radical gestures towards another marginal group of people (Irish Catholics), searching for identity in a rather indeterminate manner, Sophia Berkley gestures towards some potentially radical solutions to the existential problems being suffered by its initial readers (solutions which would eventually come to fruition in the formation of the United Irelanders).

Sophia’s literal orphanhood is mirrored by her existential loneliness and the feeling that the world is an unfriendly one, but Irish Anglicans were likewise spending a great deal of time attempting to extricate themselves from parental figures and negotiate an independent identity of their own. For too long had Irish Anglicans depended on the rhetoric of family affection connecting them to the ‘parent’ country, England, only for this affection to be taken advantage of when England routinely acted in self-interest. Samuel Madden in 1738 wrote of England as ‘our true Parent and Protector . . . who must wound herself whenever, through inadvertence she hurts us.’65 This rhetoric of familial harmony was eventually revealed as wishful thinking. The realisation that England would indeed act in self-interest and have no difficulties in wounding Ireland came slowly, but eventually Wood’s halfpenny dropped — owing to a number of factors, including (but not limited to) the Treaty of Limerick, the Woollen Act 1699, the ‘sole rights’ dispute of the 1690s, Annesley v Sherlock 1717–19, the Declaratory Act 1720, the Wood’s Halfpence crisis and, finally, the Money Bill dispute of 1753 — and a spirit of independence and even rebellion began to motivate Irish Anglican patriotic voices. Many realised that the time was ripe to break away from parents and parent figures and embrace adulthood and adult identity.

As I have explained, Irish Anglican identity was famously confused in the eighteenth century, and many different self-identifying labels were adopted, including: the ‘English of Ireland’, ‘the gentlemen of Ireland’, ‘the Protestant interest’, ‘the whole people of Ireland’, and even ‘Irish’ (enthusiastically, or in resignation). Jim Smyth has called Irish Anglicans ‘amphibious creatures’, two things at once, but this in fact underestimates the degree of confusion involved.66 In realising that the ‘mother land’ had abandoned them, many felt they were now on their own, and this realisation brought a kind of existential crisis to bear. The novel form is one place where such existential crises could be resolved, and for
Tanner, that many protagonists of major eighteenth-century novels are orphans allows them to begin the process of self-constitution without always having to look behind them for the permission of their elders. After the death of her parents, and the apparent murder of her fiancé, Sophia is all alone in the world, and it is up to her to establish her own identity. She leaves her home place, ‘where every object recalled to me some past misery’, and ‘determined to go to London . . .’ (40), where she ‘was now exposed to a faithless world, unfriended and alone!’ (42). What she comes to realise, though she never expresses this very clearly, is that she is better off without the parental baggage represented by her father (as Anglican Ireland was coming to realise, in its rejection of union with its ‘parent’ England, that it too was better off without Big Daddy), because her father was so completely useless at his job. Although she speaks of him with affection, the information the reader is provided with concerning him is conclusive in demonstrating his status as a bad father.

While clearly better off without her father, Sophia does appear at a disadvantage without her mother, although her loss undoubtedly disturbs Sophia, and she mentions it a number of times as a running sore in her life. Of course, the absence of the mother in Gothic fiction became commonplace very quickly. As Ruth Bienstock Anolik points out in her article ‘The Missing Mother’, ‘the mothers of most Gothic heroines are [typically] dead long before the readers meet the daughters’,67 prominent examples being the mothers of Isabella in The Castle of Otranto (1764) and of Emily in The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794). Missing a mother, mother-substitutes are often sought, and Sophia certainly finds them in a number of female characters who assist her, including her friends Isabella, Constantia, Fidelia and, most prominently, Mrs Williams. Carolyn Dever argues that the absence of the mother causes particular problems for fictional daughters, that it ‘creates a mystery for her . . . to solve, motivating time and again the redefinition . . . of female decorum, gender roles, and sexuality’ and that ‘maternal loss prompts anxieties that undermine a protagonist’s efforts to construct an identity’.68 The kinds of existential void into which Sophia seems to be about to fall at times may be partially explained by the haunting absence of the mother, and there is a sense in which, for Sophia’s identity crisis to be brought to a conclusion, the lost mother must be restored and reclaimed (or incorporated) into her self.

The death of Sophia’s mother is not merely an unfortunate event that happened long before she was born and an event which has traumatised her; it is plainly caused by two men: Sophia’s father and grandfather. Sophia is the product of a highly unsuitable marriage in which her
mother was badly treated by both her father and her husband. Sophie’s mother dies ‘before I was a year old’, and she is left in the hands of her father, who has already demonstrated he is not much good at protecting women from disaster. Although her father is ‘a man of strict honour; possessed of many great and excellent qualities’ he is also ‘naturally hasty and impatient of control’ and ‘a little inclined to extravagance’ (6): in other words, he is financially incompetent. He received a ‘considerable’ fortune from his post in the army but ‘this, though not inconsiderable, was hardly sufficient for a man whose ideas were like his’ (7).

It is very significant that Sophia’s mother is not simply ‘lost’ through death at the start of the novel but is also lost a second time when Sophia misplaces a watch containing her picture when she loiters on the beach with Horatio. The transition here seems simple enough – Sophia must abandon her mother completely if she is to enter fully into maturity and marry, and therefore the mother is left by the sea (a feminine space anyway) and will be fully left behind when Sophia marries and takes on the mother’s role by becoming pregnant. This second loss of the mother, however, sends Sophia into a panic, and it is when Horatio returns to the beach to retrieve the watch that he is attacked, and apparently murdered.

Leaving behind and forgetting this mother are dangerous things to do, and this incident perhaps serves as a warning that such marginal women should not be abandoned so easily. Importantly, Horatio returns to Sophia in her dreams and visions as a penetrated and bleeding body whose image terrifies and traumatises her again: ‘if I closed my eyes but an instant, Horatio’s image arose to my imagination all pale and bleeding’ (34). The male body leaking and bleeding is a feminised image connected to the abject body of the dead and absent mother. Indeed, the vision of Horatio, covered with blood and stab wounds evokes the image of the menstruating woman, essentially reminding Sophia of what a marriage with him would bring (childbirth and complete identification with the reviled female). The forgotten mother returns, then, in a particularly violent and horrific way, perhaps as a warning of what happens when such women are left on the scrap heap of history.

Images of the menstruating woman recur later in the plot when Sophia uses menstruation as a way of avoiding sex with Castilio, claiming she is ‘ill’ with (mysterious) pains and therefore cannot possibly have intercourse with him. Drawing such direct attention to her menstruation should, by cultural logic, configure Sophia as polluted and abjected, particularly given that she is still a nineteen-year-old adolescent. As Shelley Stamp Lindsey emphasizes, in Western culture, ‘poised between natural and supernatural realms . . . the menstruating adolescent girl occupies
The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction

However, as for later Gothic heroines such as Carrie White in Stephen King’s first novel (1974) or Ginger Fitzgerald in the film Ginger Snaps (2000; dir. John Fawcett), menstruation actually propels Sophia to heroic stature as she uses it to demonstrate her resistance to the demands of the sexual economy. What is particularly horrifying about Castilio, given the consistent representation of the menstruating girl in Western culture as reviled, is that he doesn’t seem put off by Sophia’s leakage, and still wants to have sex with her – a fact which could partially explain why he is represented in such extreme terms in the novel.

What Margrit Shildrick calls the ‘leaky body’ of the woman makes female characters monstrous and dangerous to a culture whose central, idealised figure is the whole, clean, differentiated body of the man. In Powers of Horror (1982), Julia Kristeva writes that the abject as a ‘jetisoned object . . . is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses . . . it lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree with a [superego’s] rules of the game’. Yet, far from Castilio feeling polluted by touching the menstruating girl, or revolted by her emission, it is the menstruating Sophia who is polluted by his presence, feeling herself ‘contaminated by his touch’ (74). Here, it is the monstrous male who is the contaminator and polluter, and Sophia uses her menstruation to gain time for herself and plot ways of escape. Far from being a disadvantage, menstruation is useful here as a way to empower a woman under the threat of rape.

Castilio is a monstrous version of the patriarchal order that Sophia has repeatedly encountered in the more benign guise in her father. Both her father and Castilio possess the power to completely destroy women. Castilio, with his insatiable sexual appetite, which extends so far as to include the desire to rape a menstruating woman, is a kind of Phallus Magnus, an absolute version of the man as monster. Linda Williams (in looking at the reaction of men and women to manifestations of the monstrous in horror) has argued that women tend to look more sympathetically at monsters as they see representations of themselves in the monster’s reviled body. According to Williams, where a man can see only ‘a biological freak with impossible and threatening appetites that suggest a frightening potency precisely where the normal male would perceive a lack’ the woman ‘recognizes the sense in which this freakishness is similar to her own difference’. For the woman, the monster is a kind of mirror. This, however, is not at all how Sophia reacts to Castilio, and she feels no sense of identification with him but only an acute awareness of how this monster is an existential threat to her.
Traditionally, woman-as-monster is primarily represented in relation to her sexuality, with particular emphasis on the abjection of her reproductive organs. Kristeva has defined abjection as that which does not ‘respect borders, positions, rules’, that which ‘disturbs identity, system, order’.74 In a society founded on the law of the father, where the ‘clean and proper body’ is associated with the supposed ‘wholeness’ of the male, woman’s body, with its threatening ‘leakiness’, comes to represent the unclean, improper body, characterised by its menstrual waste – a source of unease, loathing and disgust.75 Thus, woman’s abjection stands as the key for the preservation of patriarchal order since her monstrosity justifies her destruction and re-establishes the symbolic value of the phallus. That Castilio wants to rape Sophia despite the fact that she may be menstruating is actually an indication of how closely he associates woman with abjection: he may as well be fucking her into oblivion since she will more or less disappear as a person once he has had his way with her. In threatening her with rape, Castilio is indicating to Sophia that he has the power to wipe her out of existence, to erase completely her individual identity and propel her into an existential void. Since she understands this, it is no surprise that Sophia indicates that she would prefer death over rape, because death at least does not involve slavery. Forced union is worse than actual death to her because the former includes a devastating loss of subjectivity and agency. This should be remembered when evaluating why a non-consensual union was considered with such horror by Irish Anglicans in the 1750s.

To reassert her identity and subjectivity, Sophia is forced to become a version of the vagina dentata as she tries to escape Castilio’s mansion. Wielding a knife and cutting her way with her female accomplice through the walls of her prison, she indicates that the marginalised woman is willing to fight back. She has already astonished Castilio in asserting her independence in her conversations with him, demonstrating she has left behind the fragile femininity of which she was indulgent at the start of the novel. During the most protracted conversation between Castilio and Sophia, she insists, ‘I am prepared for your brutality; but the very moment you attempt to exercise it upon me, I shall make use of the only means left to free myself from your detested power’, upon which declaration ‘Castilio seemed amazed at me’ because ‘he had no opinion of a woman’s courage’ (72). The castrated woman in horror fiction is often identified with the passive, tame, domesticated victim, who is chased and destroyed by the male monster/castrator.76 Obvious examples here are Matilda in Walpole’s The Castle of Otranto, Antonia in Lewis’s The Monk, Amanda in Maria Regina Roche’s The Children of the Abbey (1796), right up to Mimi in Bram Stoker’s The Lair of the
White Worm (1911). Sophia rejects this passive state, and by the light of the moon (which ‘shone very bright’, 77), the symbol of the menstruating woman, and with a phallic pen-knife in hand (69), she hacks her way to freedom, transforming herself in the act into a phallic woman. The powerful woman is often represented in horror fiction as a monstrous figure, a devouring creature, destructive, savage, aggressive, who uses knives or her sharp teeth to incorporate her victims: Lucy in Dracula, Catherine Tramell in Basic Instinct (1992; dir. Paul Verhoeven), or even Jennifer Hills in I Spit on Your Grave (1978; dir. Meir Zarchi), for example. However, while in misogynistic horror the phallic woman is constructed as a grotesque parody of a man, in Sophia Berkley she is celebrated as a heroine. Clair Kahane and Susan Wolstenholme have both read the confined spaces in which Gothic heroines are enclosed as representations of the female body, and therefore the supposedly menstruating Sophia’s forced escape from this enclosed space can be seen as a destruction of that suffocating body and her full emergence into individuality. Her friend, another abjected female, acts like a kind of midwife to Sophia’s birth, though she herself is (possibly mortally) injured in the birth.

Far from abjecting women, this text confers a heroic power on them, understandable coming from a country which had been gendered female and therefore weak for centuries. Far from denigrating the castrating and phallic woman, it suggests that certain men need to be castrated and that women should be the ones to do it. Moreover, the episode where Mademoiselle de Bellville appears disguised as a man becomes meaningful in the context of the struggle against the undermining of the powerful woman in eighteenth-century Irish culture. Horatio is saved from execution by a cross-dressing woman, the Mademoiselle de Bellville (pretending to be a man called Clerimont), and when her true identity is revealed the crowd become delirious: ‘the people followed us with loud huzzas all the way’ (147). The Mademoiselle de Bellville’s actions demonstrate that women are as brave as men. ‘I would have died for you, Horatio’ (167), she declares, and although she, like Isabella, retires into a convent with a broken heart, she tells him to remember that France is a place populated by such admirable women as herself: ‘Remember, when you are in England, there are women here not unworthy of your esteem – I had almost said your tenderness’ (168). This is daring for a novel published in 1760. In actually making the cross-dressing woman a hero(ine) rather than an object of fear and disgust, the novel again legitimates the powerful woman over the weak man. Having his head cut off would have been the most straightforward act of emasculation the novel could have performed on Horatio, and it stops just short of
this by having him saved by a woman dressed as a man, a performance she seems very capable of getting away with.

There was an obsession with the cross-dressing women in eighteenth-century culture, and she was most often configured as an individual of threat and danger. As Catherine Craft-Fairchild has emphasised, while factual accounts of cross-dressing women sometimes praised them for their attempt to enter masculine life to earn money for their children, in fiction, the cross-dressing woman was ‘blamed and punished’. Notably, one such female cross dresser ‘outed’ herself in 1755 in Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke, where she explained how she had passed as a man for years, even to the point of getting married to a woman. Craft-Fairchild outlines that while such real transvestites were treated with relative respect, in a number of important fictional treatments of female cross-dressing, the transgressive woman is the cause of anxiety rather than celebration. For example, in Eliza Haywood’s Love in Excess (1719–20), when Moletta disguises herself as a page to follow the Count D’Elmont to France, her father contracts a fever. In Mary Davy’s The Accomplished Rake (1727), a cross-dressing woman causes her husband to die. Most famously, in Maria Edgeworth’s Belinda (1801), Harriet Freke is monstered through and because of her cross-dressing, a transgression that links her with revolutionary violence and radical immorality. Darryl Jones explains that Mrs Freke, the ‘sadistic cross-dressing lesbian’, is ‘the pre-eminent 1790s “unsex’d female”, the demonic political woman’.

Not so, however, in Sophia Berkley, whose transvestite is celebrated as brave, intelligent and brilliant, or as Horatio says, ‘had not my heart been already fixed for ever, the appearance and manners of Mademoiselle de Bellville would have engaged my whole attention’ (124). ‘She was, I think, the most perfect character I ever knew’ (125). Of course, by the time Horatio has returned to England he has proved himself to be a worthy husband to Sophia, and as different from her father as could be imagined, accepting and admiring of the powerful woman, and completely loyal and true to his first love. If his loud proclamations of his love of liberty should be read as echoing Irish Anglican patriotic opinion, then his reappearance following his apparent death suggests that, although some Patriot leaders like Henry Boyle appeared to have abandoned the Irish cause in the settlement of the Money Bill dispute, this is only an apparent desertion, and (like Horatio) a leader will eventually rise as if from the dead to reclaim his heroine (Ireland).

Sophia Berkley is what Nancy K. Miller has called a ‘euphoric’ epistolary novel in that the plot leads to its heroine’s redemption through marriage (as opposed to the ‘dysphoric’ plot which sees the heroine
disgraced through seduction and/or death), but here this heroine must do most of the identity defining work by herself (and for herself) because the men around her are more often than not incompetent as protectors. In its reconstitution of the abjected female as a powerful agent, the novel offers a way out of the Injured Lady’s trap. Swift could never imagine a female figure with the kind of pluck and power of Sophia or Mademoiselle de Bellville and therefore points the Injured Lady towards the Irish Anglican man as a necessary saviour. In this novel, though, the heroine is as powerful as necessary and quite capable of looking after herself. That she ends up with a liberty-loving, slavery-hating male figure is just a companionate bonus.

V

The Adventures of Miss Sophia Berkley essentially rejects the notion of a union with a foreign interloper and prefers one with Horatio, the representative of the Irish Anglican ruling class (though tellingly in its liberal guise), which is at this stage in its history becoming rather more tolerant towards Catholics (though not to Catholicism). Union with the stranger is configured as what Jim Hansen has called a ‘Gothic Marriage’ where Ireland is ‘the confined, threatened, terrorized female as England became . . . her terrorizing, avaricious, and lustful captor-husband. From the perspective of an Irish political consciousness, the Gothic is born where the domestic affection metaphor miscarries’. The key point here is that the author of Sophia Berkley rejects one kind of marriage as a sham and pretence – the very version of marriage that would eventually come to be seen, in both the Act of Union and the later national novel, as the solution to the constant difficulties in the relationship between Ireland and England – and suggests that a completely different marriage is preferable. In this, the author anticipates the views of anti-unionist figures towards the end of the century. For a while, the fate of Sophia Berkley looks grim: her proper suitor has been either killed or abducted (just as it seemed to many that Patriot opinion had been destroyed during the Money Bill dispute and the subsequent debate on a potential union), and she is prey to the attentions of a rival suitor who has only her worst interests at heart. Sophia’s abductor talks constantly of his respect for her and his love and what he will do for her future prosperity, but this rhetoric of love and affection masks his true rapacity and his real desire to have his way with her without making any real commitments. Such a union, as its mid-century detractors never tired of pointing out, was never going to be between equals and was not one which would have
mutual benefits for both; instead it promised to be a profoundly unequal one based on threats, violence and disorder. Poor Sophie has no one to protect her, given her orphan status, but while Swift fails to make the Injured Lady a figure of power like the versions of a female Ireland found in the aising tradition, the author of Sophia Berkley does make her heroine into an agent in her own destiny.

Sophia is saved, ultimately, not only by her own ingenuity and willpower but by the return of her saviour – not the Pretender, but Anglican, Patriot, Ireland, not vanquished, only misled for a while by ruffians and pirates. Sophia Berkley thus rejects what would become the standard narrative arc of the national novel at the end of the century (even if that arc is less straightforward than many critics appear to assume). In reading the ‘union’ fiction of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, Seamus Deane convicts it of liberalism, or at least a liberalism that is ultimately tied up in imperial and colonial politics. The national novel, in his reading, is a genre which attempts to convince its British readers that Ireland is cultured and alterable, capable of change and modification, capable of entering fully into modernity, and also that the Union will be worth it in the end. For Irish Anglican readers, the national novel tries to convince them that while Catholicism is, of course, an atavistic religion, particular Irish Catholics are not monsters and can be fully incorporated into the political nation and perhaps eventually convinced to give up their tenacious grip on their religion if their fellow countrymen and women show them some kindness.

Tolerance and conciliation are the key words here, although in Deane’s analysis this kind of liberal unionism is inherently suspicious. The ‘happy bourgeois family . . . becomes the model for colonizer–colonized relationships’. The national marriage ‘glosses over the contradictions, the inequalities, concealed in the institution of marriage itself . . . disguising the asymmetries encompassed within the trope of a “balanced” order’. In Sophia Berkley there is no such glossing over, and the question of consent is highlighted and emphasised in a powerful way. Moreover, the Anglo-Irish marriage never takes place and instead Sophia returns to her first love, who only appeared to have abandoned her. In never becoming a direct allegory of the Irish Anglican experience, Sophia Berkley retains an interpretive and signifying capaciousness that would be somewhat lost when the national novel emerged as it was more tied to direct allegory than earlier fiction. Even more importantly, Sophia Berkley demonstrates that far from being a genre trying to evade meaning, the Gothic is sometimes rather too meaningful and only a complete immersion in the contemporary literature helps in the interpretive project. One of these many meanings is that it is no longer appropriate
to stereotype Catholics as monstrous villains without any redeeming features, and this unmonstrering process proved a very difficult task for the early Irish Gothic novel, to which I now turn.

Notes

2. Connolly, ‘Writing the Union’, 180.
3. Maria Edgeworth to Sarah Ruxton, 29 January 1800, quoted in Hare, *Life and Letters*, 72. See also Dougherty, ‘Mr and Mrs England’.
4. James Kelly examines the discourse of the union in Irish political affairs over the long term in ‘Origins of the Act of Union’; idem, ‘Public and Political Opinion in Ireland’; David Hayton is much more sceptical about this tradition in ‘Ideas of Union’. See also Robbins, *Eighteenth-Century Commonwealth*, ch. 5; Hill, ‘Ireland without Union’.
5. The literature of the Union has received a good deal of attention from critics. See Connolly, ‘Completing the Union?’; idem, ‘Writing the Union’; McCormack, *Pamphlet Debate*.
12. Suspicion at the time was rife that Digges had refused to say the lines precisely in order to cause a riot by his Patriot friends in the audience, friends that he had invited because he was aware of the court politics of Thomas Sheridan, actor–manager of the Theatre-Royal.
15. Hill, ‘“Allegories”’, 70.
16. [Sir Richard Cox], *The True Life of Betty Ireland*.
17. Ibid., 7–19.
18. Ibid., 8.
22. For a detailed look at the events, see Murphy, ‘Dublin Anti-Union Riot’.
23. Freeman, *Short but true history*.
31. Hunter, Before Novels; Guest, Small Change, 15.
32. Cook, Epistolary Bodies, 17.
34. Favret, Romantic Correspondence, 9.
35. Heckdendorn Cook, Epistolary Bodies, 174.
36. Williams, Art of Darkness, 14, 8.
38. Anonymous, Adventures of Miss Sophia Berkley. References to the text will be made in parenthesis in the body of the chapter.
40. Ibid., 2.
42. Molyneux, Case of Ireland, 116.
43. King, State of the Anglicans of Ireland, 2.
44. M. B. Drapier, Some Observations upon a Paper, call’d, the report of the committee of the most honourable the Privy-Council in England, Relating to WOOD’s Half-Pence (Dublin: John Harding, 1724), in Swift, Drapier’s Letters, 31.
46. Lucas, Political Constitutions, Address X, 128.
47. Ibid., Address XI, 148.
49. [Brooke], Liberty and Common-Sense, 3–4.
50. Simms, Colonial Nationalism.
51. Loxley, Problematic Shores. I owe this reference to my doctoral student, Ian Kinane.
52. Ibid., 3.
53. Megennis, Irish Political System, 100.
54. Ibid., 133, 139.
55. Dickson, New Foundations, 93.
57. Trumpener, Bardic Nationalism, 142, 146.
58. Patriot Queries, 9.
59. [Henry Brooke], Liberty and Common-Sense, 22.
60. Powell, Britain and Ireland, 20.
63. McLoughlin, Contesting Ireland, 70.
64. Tanner, Adultery in the Novel, 3–4.
65. Madden, Reflections and Resolutions, 109.
68. Dever, Death and the Mother, xi, xii.
70. Lindsey, ‘Horror, Femininity’, 284.
73. Williams, ‘When the Woman Looks’, 87, 88.
77. Ibid., 107.
78. Ibid., 157.
80. Did the use of this name inspire Regina Maria Roche when she was writing *Clermont* (1798)?
83. Miller, *Heroine’s Text*, xi.