

7-20-2012

Anti-Catholicism and the Gothic Imaginary: The Historical and Literary Contexts

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Published version. "Anti-Catholicism and the Gothic Imaginary: The Historical and Literary Contexts," in *Religion in the Age of Enlightenment* 3. Ed. Brett C. McNelly. Brooklyn: AMS Press, 2012: 1-31. [Publisher Link](#). © 2012 AMS Press, Inc. Used with permission.

Anti-Catholicism and the Gothic Imaginary: The Historical and Literary Contexts

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I. What Happened to the Devil during the Enlightenment?

General historical consensus (long in the grip of Whig assumptions) has frequently proclaimed that religion during the Enlightenment period was no longer the highly contentious issue that it had been since the reformation in England.¹ By the mid-eighteenth century, the long siege of fighting and dying over religious beliefs was, in fact, believed to be safely in the past as an elite class and an enlightened bourgeoisie embraced the brave new world of rationalism. This upper crust relegated religious disputes to a much earlier European culture that had been prone to such primitive, superstitious, and irrational behaviors and beliefs. The

1. The historiography on the role of religion in the eighteenth century is complicated and fissured by competing claims: the Marxians, who see emergent capitalism and the distribution of capital as the explanation for religious change, versus the historians of ideas, who rely on discourse analysis, seeing ideology and forms of textuality as the impetus for reform. A succinct overview of the various historical schools on this issue can be found in James E. Bradley and Dale K. Van Kley, "Introduction," in *Religion and Politics in Enlightenment Europe*, ed. Bradley and Van Kley (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 1–45. And for a discussion on England's views of the Protestant Reformation as "unfinished business" and the consequential popularity of the gothic

premise of much recent scholarship, of course, is precisely the opposite.² Or to put it another way, scholars are now attuned to the fact that literary works, theatricals, and the public sphere became the sites where traditional religious disputes continued to be debated, in a somewhat baroque, stylized, and, at times, linguistically hysterical manner. I am referring here to the development of the gothic novel and more specifically, to its origins in the anti-Catholic sentiments that lingered in England due to the 1715 and 1745 Jacobite rebellions. The lessening of the laws against Catholics resulted in the 1780 Gordon riots and the attempt in 1779 by Spain to once again invade England. Given the fact that “the Catholic” had an uncomfortably uncanny tendency to resurrect itself as a continuing dynastic and political threat, the British imaginary sought to sooth its anxieties by battling the lingering forces of Catholicism by way of proxy, in a genre that was populated by villainous monks, disputed inheritances, sexually perverse devils and nuns, and inquisitions that were the very antithesis of modernity’s legal reforms and due process.³

because it displayed “the deformities of Catholicism [and] held them up to the reader for the purposes of Protestant delectation.” See Robert Miles, “Europhobia: The Catholic Other in Horace Walpole and Charles Maturin,” in *European Gothic: A Spirited Exchange*, ed. Avril Horner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 84–103. But, as Miles notes, “Anti-Catholicism is frequently a screen for national concerns,” meaning that for him the gothic is actually much less concerned with religion per se and much more focused on anxieties about the new sources for political and social legitimacy, or the lack of them, in a society that had suspended the Divine Right of Kings and had no plausible replacement on hand (84). In postrevolutionary France, of course, anxieties toward England and the German states were all the more intense, with the added complication of Napoleonic censorship and military aggression during the Empire Period. In the German principalities, we can see fear of political violence oscillating with an incipient drive toward nationalism, all of this complicated by Protestant and Catholic factionalism.

2. For instance, Linda Colley has emphasized the role of Protestantism in the business of nation building in her *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 11–54, while Colin Haydon in *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993) has foregrounded the role that popular displays of anti-Catholicism had in unifying the country under the Hanovers (131–61).

3. Mark Canuel sees the gothic as investigating the mechanisms of power, the deceptive practices of “priestcraft,” by which Catholic nations enforce a uniformity of belief on subjects; the gothic novel seeks to “expose what it deemed to be a terrifying logic of confessional government and then to assume—precisely as a remedy to the anxieties about Catholicism it generated—a more tolerant relation to religious belief,” (*Religion, Toleration and British Writing, 1790–1830* [Cambridge: Cambridge University

From the religious and intellectual upheavals that occurred during the reign of Henry VIII to the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688, England entered the eighteenth century in the grip of both scientific rationalism and spiritual uncertainty and anxiety. France and Germany went through similar—although certainly not identical—reforms, revolutions, and transformations. As Maurice Lévy has observed, the 1688 Revolution by which the Protestant ascendancy was finally established was much more important for the development of the gothic than was the French Revolution because "in some sense the fantastic is a compensation that man provides for himself, at the level of the imagination, for what he has lost at the level of faith." For Lévy, the gothic is not a simple textual substitution for discredited religious beliefs, but instead "a genuine expression of profound religious malaise."⁴ But I would claim that there is a good deal of textual substitution being enacted, and some of the primary substitutes are the characters of the corrupt monk, the perfidious Jesuit, and the Grand Inquisitor for the devil.

Press, 2002], 56). On the gothic and legal issues, see Leslie Moran, "Law and the Gothic Imagination," in *The Gothic*, ed. Fred Botting (Cambridge: Brewer, 2001), 87–109; Beth Swan, "Radcliffe's Inquisition and Eighteenth-Century English Legal Practice," *The Eighteenth-Century Novel* 3 (2003): 195–216; and Kathryn Temple, "Gender and Juridical Space in the Gothic Novel," in *Illicit Sex: Identity Politics in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Thomas DiPiero and Pat Gill (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 68–85.

4. Maurice Lévy, *Le Roman 'Gothique' Anglais 1764–1824* (Toulouse: Association des publications de la Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines de Toulouse, 1968); translated and quoted by Joel Porte ("In the Hands of an Angry God: Religious Terror in Gothic Fiction," *The Gothic Imagination*, ed. G. R. Thompson [Spokane: Washington State University Press, 1974]). Porte himself argues that much of Anglo-American gothic fiction is characterized by "a brooding sense of religious terror which is notably Protestant in its origin and bearing" (45), while he claims that Godwin's *Caleb Williams* can be read as "secularized Calvinism . . . Prometheus-as-Protestant" (52). Irene Bostrom ("The Novel and Catholic Emancipation," *Studies in Romanticism* 2 [1962]: 155–76) has noted that the number of Catholics in Britain had declined under the penal laws to less than seventy thousand; "there were no parish priests or monastic institutions; . . . [therefore, m]any English readers would have had only the slightest acquaintance with actual Catholics" (159). More recently, Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996) sees "the production of Gothic novels in northern European Protestant countries [as having] an anti-Catholic subtext" (5). In a similar vein, Victor Sage sees the gothic as a caustic response to "the campaign for Catholic Emancipation from the 1770s onward until . . . the Emancipation Act of 1829" (see his *Horror Fiction in the Protestant Tradition* [London: Macmillan, 1988], 28–29).

The devil, of course, was the ultimate external and assaulting force on the soul of humanity, and for centuries Western consciousness was preoccupied with battling this wily opponent. A major move in displacing the devil from his dominance occurred in 1736 when the British Parliament banned all laws that would have allowed courts to convict anyone of demonic possession or witchcraft. Certainly the passage of this law was a Protestant triumph because, as Lennard Davis notes, the "Catholic Church was seen as having the inside track on exorcisms, and banning the idea of possession was in effect a way of banning popery in general."⁵ In France, the last man to be tried for witchcraft and sorcery was the Jesuit Jean-Baptiste Girard, accused of seducing a nun under his spiritual direction (the specific charge was "spiritual incest") in 1730–31. The Girard case ended in an acquittal, although Girard himself was the subject of burnings in effigy, and even his friends thought he received the brunt of the damage in the media battle between him and his victim, who was countersued by Girard, placed on trial, and acquitted herself.⁶ The devil also became increasingly identified with the pope in eighteenth-century lower-class British imaginary. The annual and ritualized Guy Fawkes burnings, as well as the liturgies that were held in every Anglican Church on November 5, consistently linked the devil to the pope, and such an association would continue developing throughout a number of gothic novels and chapbooks.⁷ In fact, we need to reevaluate the notion that the 1605 Guy Fawkes conspiracy to assassinate the king and the entire Protestant ruling class by blowing up Parliament was a long-forgotten nonevent

5. Lennard Davis, *Obsession* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 33.

6. For the best overview of the Girard case, see Jason T. Kuznicki, "Sorcery and Publicity: The Cadière-Girard Scandal of 1730–1731," *French History* 21 (2007): 289–312. Kuznicki states that the trial "touched on the Jesuit-Jansenist controversy, quietism, drugs and poisons and the role of print culture in eighteenth-century France" (290).

7. An extensive discussion of the pope's association with the devil during the Guy Fawkes festivities can be found in Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism*, chapter 1. The devil's literal appearance in any number of gothic novels (in particular, those by Lewis and Maturin) suggests that the gothic imaginary worked by transforming historically distant but lingering political and historical fears such as the gunpowder plot, the Spanish Armada, the Irish massacre, and the Jacobite rebellions, and presenting them in slightly disguised forms (the pope and devil now represented by a "possessed" monk or his amorous seductress).

in the eighteenth century. As late as 1818, a chapbook version of the entire history—which blamed the conspiracy on a Jesuit instigator—was published in Penrith.

In addition to the continual fretting about the devil in their midst, the late eighteenth-century common folk found agreement in the three basic tenets of British anti-Catholicism: political distrust of the clergy, theological disagreements about transubstantiation, and popular fears about foreign invasions from the Catholic countries of France and Spain.⁸ All of these aspects of the anti-Catholic agenda—along with the widespread suspicion of a variety of sexual perversions practiced among a “celibate” clergy—can be found in outlandish forms in any number of gothic novels. The devil most frequently finds gothic embodiment as a lurking Jesuit, Dominican, or Capuchin (as was Ambrosio in Lewis’s *The Monk*, 1796), scheming to assassinate innocent victims, steal the inheritances of rivals, or seduce his hapless prey. The Dominicans were infamous for presiding over the Spanish Inquisition (1478–1834), and the Jesuits had been implicated in a variety of failed political assassination attempts during the Tudor and Stuart dynastic disputes in England. For instance, Mrs. Patrick’s 1799 novel, *The Jesuit*, is a three-volume work on the infamous Babington plot, presenting John Ballard as a cunning and unscrupulous Jesuit who could change his appearance, assume false identities and accents, and use Mary Queen of Scots’s daughter to seduce Anthony Babington—the Catholic heir to a large estate—all in the unsuccessful attempt to have him assassinate Elizabeth in order to place Mary Queen of Scots on the throne. Ballard’s fellow Jesuits, Campion and Creighton, make cameo appearances in the novel, a quasi-gothic that repeats all of the usual charges against the Jesuits: “We intend to openly rule the world, and without concealment, decide the fate of empires” (III.123).

It is certainly no coincidence that scenes from the Inquisition begin to appear in gothic novels, most notoriously in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian* (1797), but also prominently in Lewis’s *Monk* and Maturin’s *Melmoth* and in such chapbooks as *The Spanish Hero: or, History of Alonzo the Brave, Containing an Authentic Account of the Wars between the Spaniards and*

8. Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism*, 3.

the Moors, in the Reign of Alphonso III; to Which Is added, A Correct Description of the Spanish Inquisition; And an Account of the Cruel Punishment Inflicted on Its Victims at the Inquisitorial Delivery, Named an *Auto de Fe* (1800) or the translation of August von Kotzebue's *The History and Surprising Adventures of Joseph Pignata: Who, with Several Others, Was Confined in the Dungeons of the Holy Inquisition for a Suspected Crime; The Dreadful Sufferings and Tortures They Underwent* (1821). The sudden reappearance of the Spanish Inquisition in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century gothic texts was obviously inspired by a number of historical factors: the agitation that preceded the war against Spain in 1738–39 and the subsequent commencement of hostilities, causing another upsurge of popular prejudice against Catholicism; the failed invasion attempt by Spain in 1779; and the knowledge that in Spain between 1746 and 1759, ten people were burned by the Inquisition for their religious beliefs.⁹ *The Spanish Hero* presents for lower-class consumption a detailed depiction of the Inquisition, focusing its gaze on the practice of torture and martyrdom, all of which were designed to recall the Marian martyrs who had fallen victim to Mary Tudor during her reign:

This *Auto de Fe*, as the Romish priests impiously call it (the Act of Faith) inflicts the most shocking tortures upon the prisoners thereby to enforce confession. As all crimes are, in the most infamous court, supposed to be against religion, the judges are most remorseless cruel men; who seldom fail of finding a pretext for committing the most innocent victims to the flames, often through mere pique or resentment. In the case of Fabian and his assassins there certainly wanted no stimulus to priestly vengeance. They were found guilty without any recourse to base means; and were sentenced to be first strangled, and then their bodies burnt along with the other condemned wretches, at the next Inquisitorial delivery. (26–27)

The public procession was “led by Dominican friars” and included all classes of the condemned, including relapsed Jews and Moors, while

9. *Ibid.*, 25.

“those doomed to be burnt had also a Jesuit on each side, who were continually exhorting them to adjure, what they termed damnable doctrines. . . . At one end of this scaffolding sat the Inquisitors, and at the other, were placed the victims of bigotry and superstition” (28). A friar

harangued in a kind of sermon made up of the most fulsome encomiums on the Inquisition, and bitter invectives against heresy (the religion of the Church of England). . . . The negative and relapsed being first strangled and then burnt, the professed were made to mount their stakes by a ladder; while the Jesuits, after further exhortations to be reconciled to their church, at last exclaimed that they leave them to the Devil, who is standing at their elbows to snatch their souls and fly with them to the flames of hell. On this a great shout was raised, with a clamorous cry which in English is “Let the dogs beards be singed. . . .” Language cannot depict so horrible a sight [the burning of the stakes]. The dying men, while sufficient power remained, crying out, “Misericordia per amor de Dios”—pity for the love of God: yet it was beheld by both sexes with transports of joy . . . and exultation!!! (28; author’s emphasis)

This gruesome description, which is reproduced almost verbatim in virtually every gothic text in which the Inquisition appears, focuses not simply on the horrible acts of a corrupt clergy who preside over a mockery of justice but on how Catholicism as a religious system dehumanizes its practitioners, both men and, more ominously, women. The demonization of women due to their allegiance to the Catholic faith will be developed much further in the many evil and licentious nuns who begin to appear in gothic textualities, but the chain of blame here in the public imaginary is clearly being placed on the inhuman system established and presided over by the more powerful male clergy.

If the devil assumes the human shape of a monk or a Jesuit in the eighteenth century and earlier, he will, in the nineteenth century, begin to take the form of a vampire, a blood sucker who consumes the life of and infects with disease a prosperous and healthy (Protestant) nation.

The obsessive focus on blood and later vampires in the gothic also connects to fears of witchcraft rituals, but can be seen as yet another veiled attempt to confront some of the more eccentric aspects of the theological debates about the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation (just when is “blood the life” and how does a body become invaded when this transfer of power is accomplished through a fluid?).

In addition to bodily anxieties, there were also territorial concerns about the borders of England being invaded by foreign forces like the Spanish and the French. Specifically the invasion fears were twofold: first, the invasions were as current as 1715 and then 1745, with the last attempt by the exiled and Catholic Stuarts (supported by the French) to reclaim the throne; and second and more frighteningly, in August 1779 the combined Spanish and French fleets had come as close to invading England as anyone had in recent history. “The attempted invasion of 1779 had awakened the age-old fears of a ‘beleaguered Protestant isle’ threatened by an alliance of Catholic powers.”¹⁰ All of these historical, theological, and social factors were pervasive in the cultural consciousness, and all of them, to some extent, began appearing in exaggerated and hyperbolic forms in the productions of the gothic imaginary.

Perhaps one of the most dangerously political of all Jesuits was the Abbé Augustin Barruel, whose *Memoirs, Illuminating the History of Jacobinism* (1797) proffered to expose Masonic, Rosicrucian, and Illuminati activities in France, tracing the origins of the French Revolution from the Illuminati in Ingoldstadt to the Freemasons, philosophers, and Jacobins, and then to the mobs on the street. His *Mémoires* (first translated into English in 1798) also blamed anticlerical novels and plays for the political and religious violence that had been unleashed, and he depicted secret societies like the Illuminati as the cause of the French Revolution based on their attempts to drive out the Jesuits and unleash a full-scale antimonarchical and antiecclesiastical conspiracy.¹¹

10. Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism*, 203.

11. See Barruel's *Memoirs, Illustrating the History of Jacobinism*, trans. Robert Clifford (London: Burton, 1798). And for a discussion of Catholic attempts to demonize the French revolutionaries, see Geoffrey Cubbitt, “God, Man, and Satan: Strands in Counter-Revolutionary Thought among Nineteenth-Century French Catholics,” in *Catholicism in Britain and France since 1789*, ed. Frank Tallett and Nicholas Atkin (London: Hambledon Press, 1996), 135–55.

Feeding the political and religious paranoia of the times, Barruel's work depicts a Europe filled with secret cabals of revolutionary Freemasons conducting assaults on individuals through "secret tribunals" of torture and sadistic punishment and finally engaged in plotting the overthrow of governments. In the British imaginary, however, the Illuminati were interchangeable with the Jesuits because both groups were devilish: secretive, fanatical, and anti-Protestant.

II. Why Are Monks and Nuns in Gothic Novels?

Schedoni. Ambrosio. These are just two of the most famous names that resonate in the gothic canon; they represent the gothic villain or damaged (satanic) antihero writ large—large enough for his culture to startle and stare. But why would recognizable embodiments of Satan begin to appear in novels around 1760? In other words, how are cultural historians to understand the gothic novel? It appeared in England first as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), complete with a somewhat meddlesome monk, a disputed estate, and a long-lost heir, but then the literary embodiments of the devil traveled to France and Germany,¹² and began to explore very similar terrain: a deserted abbey, a lecherous monk pursuing a virtuous maid (who sometimes awkwardly turns out to be his sister), and a contested title or stolen castle to be returned by novel's end to its rightful owner. As one might imagine, literary critics have been scratching their heads for at least one hundred years about

12. See Daniel Hall, *French and German Gothic Fiction in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), for the most extensive discussion of the French and German gothic traditions; both traditions are indebted to their British sources but both clearly influence each other and the evolving British works. Other scholarly studies on the same issue include Terry Hale, "French and German Gothic: The Beginnings," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Gothic*, ed. Jerrold Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 63–84; Katherine Astbury, "The Moral Tale in France and Germany 1750–1789," *Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 7 (2002); Peter Mortensen, *British Romanticism and Continental Influences: Writing in an Age of Europhobia* (New York: Palgrave, 2004); and Peter Mortensen, "The Englishness of the English Gothic Novel: Romance Writings in an Age of Europhobia," in *Better in France?: The Circulation of Ideas Across the Channel in the Eighteenth Century* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 269–97.

the reasons for the gothic's appearance and sustained popularity, and serious historians do not, as far as I know, venture near the question. As I have suggested, the gothic imaginary came into being by transmuting a number of historical events as its originating source materials: first, the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation and the long and contested Tudor and Stuart dynastic dispute as it played out in England through as late as 1745; second, the notorious and numerous anticlerical French works that depicted ravaged nuns, licentious and scheming priests, and dark deeds done in a dismal abbey served as a warm-up for the expulsion of the Jesuits as well as the French Revolution. I think a case can be made that together these two phenomena—materialism and ideology—provided the scaffolding for one of the major imaginary structures of the gothic novel, that is, its investment in the anti-Catholic (anticlerical) campaign that was a major component in the modernization and secularization process in Europe.¹³

In order to vindicate his break with the Roman Catholic Church in 1534, King Henry VIII enacted the Oath of Supremacy and Allegiance to the ruling monarch, as head of the Church of England. As one would expect, the oath was suspended during the reign of Henry's eldest daughter, Mary, but was promptly reinstated during the reign of Elizabeth. After the Restoration in 1660, Catholics managed for a few years to avoid taking the oath, but in 1672 a Test Act was passed requiring all office holders to swear that they did not believe that they were literally eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ ("transubstantiation") in the sacrament of communion. After the Titus Oates plot in 1678, another test developed for potential office holders, and this time Catholics were obliged to swear that they would not invoke or pray to the Virgin Mary or any of the saints, and to declare such beliefs superstitious and idolatrous. With the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the Test Act was vigorously enforced and, over the next century,

13. See Ronald Paulson, "Gothic Fiction and the French Revolution," *ELH* 48 (1981): 532–54, for the most detailed discussion of the influence of the French Revolution on the development of the gothic imaginary. My recent book, *Gothic Riffs: Secularizing the Uncanny in the European Imaginary, 1780–1820* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010), develops at length how the gothic was complicit in an agenda of "ambivalent secularization."

attempts were made in at least two "Relief Acts" to revise the oath so that Catholics who were forced to swear to it would not be denouncing the pope as the head of their own religion. Religion was tightly bound up with political allegiances, and in many ways, choosing a religion was a statement about loyalty to the "old ways," the Stuart claimants to the throne, or to the Whigs' more liberal and progressive agenda: the Protestant Hanoverian dynasty.

Denis Diderot's *The Nun* (1759) is perhaps the most famous example of a French prerevolutionary, anticlerical novel, but there were many other works that we know influenced the early British gothicists, particularly Lewis, who spent a fair amount of time attending such theater productions in Paris and writing to his mother about their appeal. In a letter sent to his mother during the summer of 1791, Lewis notes that "*Les Victimes Cloîtrées* is another [drama] which would undoubtedly succeed [in London]."¹⁴ Other anticlerical works were Jean Baptiste de Boyer Argens's *Intrigues Monastiques ou L'amour Encapuchonné*, published at The Hague in 1739, Olympe de Gouges's drama *The Convent or Them Forced Wishers* (1790), and Charles-Joseph Pougens's *Julie, or la Religieuse de Nîmes* (1792), in which the heroine is imprisoned in a convent much as was Suzanne in Diderot's *The Nun* or Agnes in Lewis's *Monk*. Another work is Baculard D'Arnaud's anti-Catholic tragedy, *Coligny; ou La Saint Barthelemi* (1750), which depicted Catholic atrocities during the St. Bartholomew massacre and was a direct influence on Jacques-Marie Boutet de Monvel's gothic drama *Les Victimes de Cloîtrées* (1791) and later Elizabeth Inchbald's *The Massacre* (1792).

Monvel's play concerns a noblewoman, Madame de Saint-Alban, who, intent on blocking the marriage of her daughter Eugenie to the honorable but poor Dorval, involves her confessor, Père Laurent, in an attempt to conceal the young woman in a convent. Thinking she is dead, Dorval enters the adjoining monastery and, unbeknownst to him, ends up in a cell next to his beloved. The drama was one of the

14. Lewis quoted in Eino Railo, *The Haunted Castle: A Study of the Elements of English Romanticism*, 1927 (Rpt. New York: Humanities, 1964), 85. Also see Frederick S. Frank, "François Thomas Marie de Baculard d'Arnaud," in *Gothic Writers: A Critical and Bibliographical Guide*, eds. Douglass Thomson, Jack Voller, and Fred Frank (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2002), 48–52.

sources for both Radcliffe's *The Italian* and Lewis's *Monk*, but Lewis was so drawn to the material that he decided to make a direct adaptation of Monvel in his own drama *Venoni; or The Novice of St. Mark's* (Drury Lane, 1808). Baculard D'Arnaud's *Euphémie: ou, Le Triomphe de la religion* (1768) was yet another early anti-Catholic dramatic monastic shocker (*drame monacal*), in which a young woman is forced into the convent after an unfortunate love affair only to die miserably there in the throes of spiritual dread and visions of hell (hence the ironic title "the triumph of religion"). Never performed, but avidly read by French as well as German and British gothicists, the drama anticipates modernist practices by presenting ghosts as the products of troubled or guilty imaginations, while religious belief is depicted as a pretext by which the powerful control the weak.

Finally, there is the Père Girard and Mary Catherine Cadière case in France, so notorious that it spawned a virtual publication industry in chapbooks and pornographic materials and became a biting satiric comedy *The Debauchees: or, the Jesuit Caught* in 1732 in the hands of the anti-Catholic Henry Fielding. (Fielding was also the author of the inflammatory *A Dialogue between the Devil, the Pope and the Pretender*, 1745.) Seduced by her confessor and forced to procure an abortion with his assistance, Mary Cadière's case was the subject of many early 1730s pamphlets in both France and England which, "with corrections, went through at least eleven editions, and inspired other pieces of the same type, extensive newspaper reports, broadsheets, prints, and a set of rhymes."¹⁵ It also was, I am convinced, part of the impetus for Matthew Lewis's depiction of Ambrosio's rape of Antonia in *The Monk*, as well as a number of the more sensationalized "captive nun" narratives in later gothic texts. In order to specifically connect the Girard case to the origins of the British gothic tradition, let me note that we know that Horace Walpole intensely disliked Fielding, no doubt for a variety of personal reasons, and we also know that Lewis performed some of Fielding's plays in his private theatricals at home.¹⁶ Given the knowledge that both of them had of Fielding's

15. Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism*, 38.

16. Fielding's suspected involvement in a pamphlet campaign against Horace Walpole's father, Robert, is discussed in R. C. Jarvis, "The Death of Walpole: Henry Fielding and a

works as well as the extensive visits that they both made to Paris, it is more than probable that they would have been familiar with the story, both through Fielding's depiction of the episode as well as through its graphic and pornographic depiction in the French popular press (see Figures 1 and 2).

The gothic literary genre arose very specifically at a time when this culture was attempting to school itself in a variety of empiricist protocols and repudiate a long-standing system of "magical" beliefs—ghosts, witches, the mysterious healing powers of saints, the Virgin Mary, confessions, bread and wine, and perhaps even, as the most radical thinkers argued, the existence of God and the soul itself. As Great Britain modernized and moved into the eighteenth century, the rationality and self-control that were so highly prized by Protestant individualism and the Enlightenment ideology moved to center stage in early gothic literature, creating a new cultural ideal that chastised idolatry, superstition, hierarchy, and popery in all its forms. But one could hardly characterize the gothic as a uniformly consistent Enlightenment genre. In fact, numerous critics have seen the gothic as a series of nostalgic and ambivalent gestures combined with conflicted and contradictory poses—a mode of writing composed by authors who mixed piety with equal parts of political and social anxiety. For example, the Protestant Settlement of 1688, known as the "Glorious Revolution," allowed Britain to avoid another bloodbath on the order that it had experienced with the beheading of Charles I. It also institutionalized Anglican Protestantism, complete with the requirement that one needed to pledge an Oath of Supremacy and Allegiance to the monarch as the supreme head of the Church of England in order to obtain a legal, governmental, or military position, and later even to attend a university. Thus began the legal discrimination against British Catholics who refused to take the oath for reasons of faith.

Forgotten Cause Célèbre," *The Modern Language Review* 41 (1946): 113–30; the Licensing Act of 1737, orchestrated by Robert Walpole, took Fielding off the stage and forced him to turn to novel writing. Horace Walpole's nasty comments about Fielding are discussed in *The Works of Henry Fielding*, ed. Thomas Roscoe (London: Bohn, 1851), xxv. Matthew Lewis's productions of Fielding's works are discussed in David Lorne Macdonald, *Monk Lewis: A Critical Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 158.



FIGURE 1: Giséy de Bordelet, *Histoire du Père Jean Baptiste Girard Jésuite, et de la Delle Marie-Catherine Cadière*, divisée en 32 planches. Paris: ca 1730.

Courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris-Richelieu.

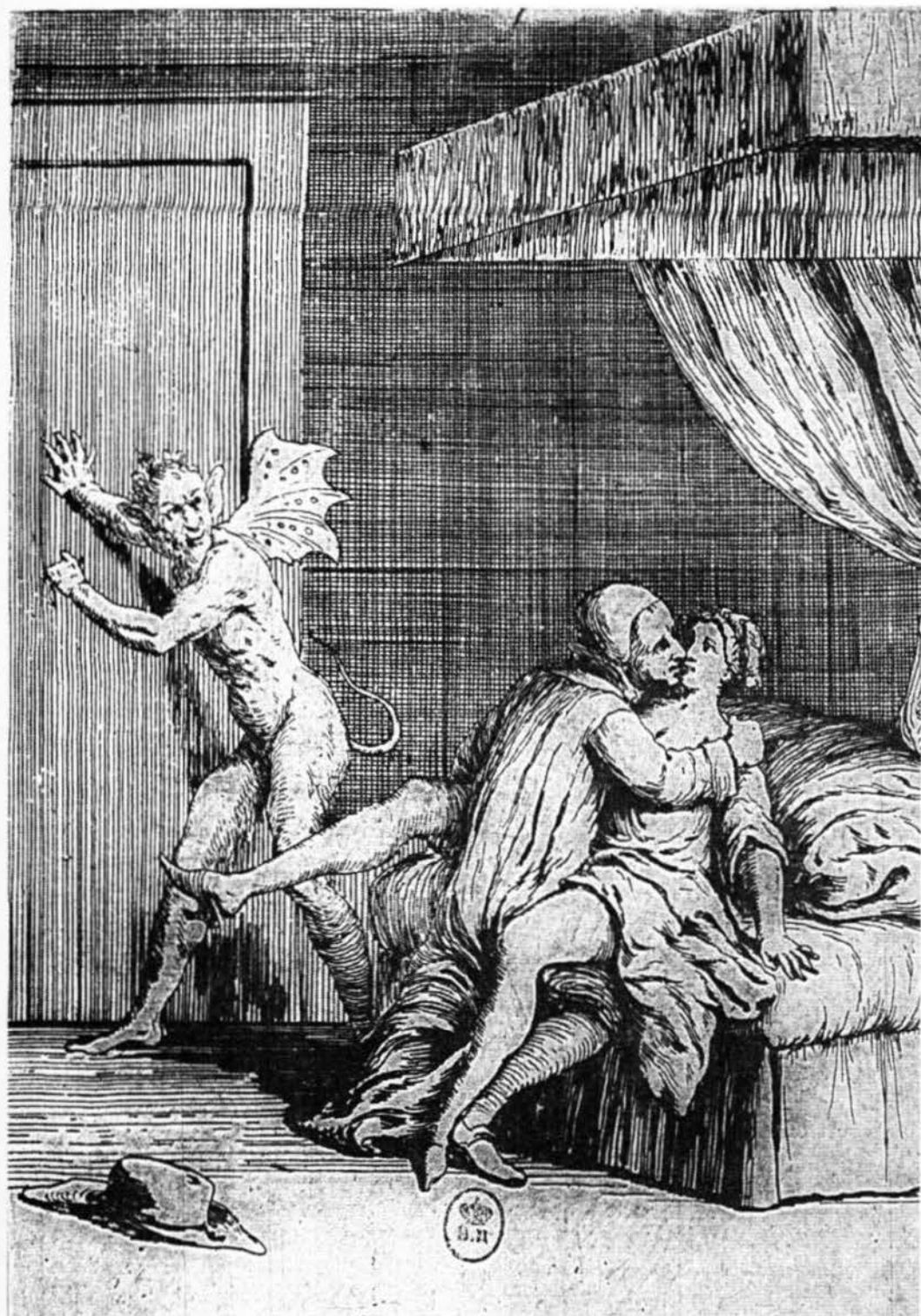


FIGURE 2: Gissey de Bordelet, *Histoire du Père Jean Baptiste Girard Jésuite, et de la Delle Marie-Catherine Cadière*, divisée en 32 planches. Paris: ca 1730.

Courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris-Richelieu.

Clearly the issue here is not simply one of renouncing religious beliefs or a set of practices but of declaring political and nationalistic loyalties. Given the chaos that ensued during the reigns of Mary and Elizabeth, and the Stuart and Cromwell periods that followed, it is fair to say that fear of religious extremism characterized a good deal of the British public. Rather than recognizing that both sides shared responsibility equally for the mayhem that had occurred, the majority of the population, now Protestant, scapegoated Catholics for the history of civil and political unrest following Henry's reign. The influential British writer Joseph Glanvill (1636–80) in *Saducismus Triumphatus: or, Full and Plain Evidence Concerning Witches and Apparitions. In Two Parts. The First Treating of Their Possibility. The Second of Their Real Existence* (1681) asserted that Catholicism was the work of the devil and the archenemy of reason and truth. *Saducismus* was popular enough to be reprinted twice during the eighteenth century; for some reason, perhaps the vivid illustrations, it was the favorite book of Matthew Lewis's mother, and Lewis himself apparently spent his youth drooling over the garish plates of witch burnings (Railo, 82).

With such a context in mind, we should not be surprised to read a letter sent to the Catholic Committee in 1788, in which Bishop Walmesley noted,

It is well known that a great share of prepossessions and prejudices remain still in the breasts of Protestants against the Catholic Religion, not confined among the common people, but prevail even with those of higher class and more improved state of knowledge. These prepossessions and prejudices are imbibed in their youth, and make a common part of their early education, nor do they afterwards examine into the grounds of them, but implicitly retain them as genuine truth.¹⁷

17. Glanvill discussed in Ann McWhir, "The Gothic Transgression of Disbelief: Walpole, Radcliffe, and Lewis," in *Gothic Fictions: Prohibition/Transgression*, ed. Kenneth W. Graham (New York: AMS Press, 1989), 29–48: quotation on 33. Bishop Walmesley quoted Bernard Ward, *The Dawn of the Catholic Revival in England, 1781–1803* (London: Longmans, Green, 1909), 5–6.

England and France were certainly not unique in anti-Catholic sentiments during the period that many British gothic/romantic writers (Walpole, Lewis, the Shelleys, Byron, Radcliffe, Coleridge, and Wordsworth) were traveling throughout France, Italy, Germany, and Switzerland. In Leipzig in 1783 an anonymously published romance entitled *Die Päbstinn Johann* appeared, presenting a female Pope Joan who was exposed as a woman only when she gave birth to a child in the streets of Rome during a saint's day procession. Thrown into a prison, she died there, abandoned in her misery. The "female Pope" had long been a popular legend before it became a particularly scurrilous Protestant fantasy, with even John Donne writing about her scandal in his anti-Jesuit fiction *Ignatius His Conclave*, written shortly after the failed Gunpowder Plot.¹⁸ This anti-Catholic device of revealing a supposedly male ecclesiastic to be a female in disguise would become a persistent gothic trope, repeated, for instance, in Lewis's *Monk* as well as in *Lusignan, or The Abbaye of La Trappe*.¹⁹ In this work, Brother Ambrose turns out to be the long-lost heiress Emily, living in the disguise in the aforementioned Abbey La Trappe. Generally the trope is used to expose the sexual hypocrisy of a clergy that swears to the ideal of celibacy and yet most frequently and egregiously violates said oath in practice (again, the core of the Père Girard scandal and the Ambrosio-Mathilda relationship).

The German gothic is a complex, religiously inflected genre because the northern half of the area was vehemently Lutheran, while the southern part, Bavaria, was staunchly Catholic. Religion in the Germanic states was a political issue as well, and we can see similar dynastic anxieties and competing factions writ large in a number of German gothic works, most particularly Friedrich von Schiller's *The*

18. On *Die Päbstinn Johann*, see Michael Hadley, *The Undiscovered Genre: A Search for the German Gothic Novel* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1977), 115; and on Donne, see Arthur F. Marotti, "Alienating Catholic in Early Modern England: Recusant Women, Jesuits and Ideological Fantasies," in *Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism in Early Modern English Texts*, ed. Arthur F. Marotti (New York: Macmillan, 1999), 1-34; quotation on 20-21. Also see C. A. Patrides, "'A Palpable hieroglyphick': The Fable of Pope Joan," in *Premises and Motifs in Renaissance Thought and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 152-81.

19. *Lusignan, or The Abbaye of La Trappe*, 4 vols. (London: Minerva Press: 1801).

Ghost-Seer (1789). Set in Venice and written in fragmented letter and journal entries between two noblemen, *The Ghost-Seer* recounts the attempted conversion of an unnamed Protestant prince to Catholicism. Part seduction narrative and part hocus-pocus, the mysterious stranger (disguised as an Armenian with supposedly supernatural powers but clearly intended to be read as an Illuminati) uses all his wiles to persuade the prince to join the "cabal," which also includes a beautiful young woman with whom the prince falls in love. The Illuminati were viewed as interchangeable with the Jesuits in the European imaginary, and certainly Schiller intended to depict the Catholic Church as a force for social and political reaction and evil in Europe. In an expanded version of the tale, the prince is tricked into converting, attempts to murder a man who stands in his way of gaining the throne, fails, and then is poisoned himself by the Armenian. A blatantly anti-Catholic novel, the story ends as the prince dies "in the bitterest agonies of contrition and remorse" (242). Schiller's themes of betrayal, homosocial political maneuvering, secret cabals, and underground meetings can all be detected in any number of German gothic novels. As Jacqueline Howard has observed, German popular fiction in the 1790s had "a strong anti-Catholic bias"²⁰ and dwelt almost obsessively on the motifs of the secret society (understood and read by the culture as substitutes for Jesuits or Illuminati), clandestine political organizations (again, read Jesuits or Illuminati), bandit outcasts, wicked and scheming clerics, mistaken identities, underground passages and vaults, imprisonments and murder plots gone awry, and spirits mixed with erotica. Some of the German gothic works that were fairly quickly translated into English include Cajetan Tschink's *Victim of Magical Delusions, or the Mystery of the Revolution in P---l, a Magico-Political Tale* (1795), Karl Grosse's *The Genius* (1796; translated as *Horrid Mysteries*), and Veit Weber's *The Sorcerer* (1795). There is in all of these works an intense distrust of Catholicism as an antiquated religion spreading discord and disloyalty

20. See Jacqueline Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction: A Bakhtinian Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 229. Also see Schiller, *The Ghost Seer or, Apparitionist: An Interesting Fragment, Found among the Papers of Count O*****. From the German of Schiller (New York: Printed by T. and J. Swords, 1796—microfilm, 242).

among citizens who owe their allegiance to their prince, not to a distant and foreign pope.

For Walter Scott and numerous other Britons, Catholicism continued to pose a political and nationalistic threat to Britain, with Walter Scott stating that he believed that “feudal tyranny and Catholic superstition continue to exercise their sway over the slave and bigot, and to indulge the haughty lord, or more haughty priest, with that sort of despotic power, the exercise of which seldom fails to deprave the heart and disorder the judgment.”²¹ Traces of an almost cartoonish Catholicism²²—like the public deathbed confession, the belief that the dead can return as spirits (usually carrying blue lights) to demand vengeance or at least a burial in hallowed ground, the notion that suffering is inevitable and serves a purpose in the cosmic scheme of things, or that the devil can assume the form of a beautiful young woman in order to trick people into losing their everlasting souls—circulated in the gothic chapbooks. The question is, to whose benefit was it for the lower classes to continue to fear the Catholic “Other” in their midst? It is not irrelevant, I think, that Horace Walpole’s father, Robert, was the first Whig “prime minister” of England, while Matthew Lewis served as a Whig member of parliament for one term. The Whigs’ agenda was, as Haydon and others have observed, deeply invested in anti-Catholicism, and one of their methods was clearly to take to the road of ideology and propaganda, hence the gothic imaginary.

In fact, in order to understand the gothic, I think that we need to both recognize the deeply anti-Catholic nature of most of its tropes and themes,

21. Walter Scott, *The Lives of the Novelists*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 1825), I: 198.

22. See Victoria Nelson, who has defined what she calls the “faux Catholic,” a “sub-genre from Monk Lewis to Dan Brown” (“Faux Catholic: A Gothic Subgenre from Monk Lewis to Dan Brown,” *boundary 2* 34 [2007]: 87–107). The “faux Catholic,” however, had its origins much further back; in fact, according to Peter Wagner, in the early anti-Catholic pornographic polemic of Pietro Aretino (1492–1556), and then in early anticlerical French works such as *The History of Mademoiselle de St. Phale, Giving a Full Account of the Miraculous Conversion of a Noble French Lady and Her Daughter, to the Reformed Religion. With the Defeat of the Intrigues of a Jesuite Their Confessor. Translated out of French* (London: 1691), cited by Godwin as an influence on his *Caleb Williams*. See Wagner, “Anti-Catholic Erotica in Eighteenth-Century England,” in *Erotica and the Enlightenment* (Frankfurt: Secker & Warburg, 1991), 116–92.

and understand that the texts themselves served the blatantly ideological function of secularizing and reformulating the major tenets and representations of Christianity. Susan Griffin has argued that Anglo-American Protestantism had, by the eighteenth century, "marked Catholicism as a retrograde religion" and presented it as a reminder of the "past [that] haunts the present . . . as the uncanny, manifested in monsters both literal and metaphoric: the murdered and murdering father, the gang of thugs, the living dead, bloody bodies, vampires."²³ Certainly it is difficult not to recognize the virulent anti-Catholicism in gothic texts, just as it is difficult to ignore the vehement statements made by a number of writers who took up the pen to compose gothic works. As I have suggested, the historical background is crucial in trying to understand the context in which the gothic flourished and, as Denis Paz has noted, "Anti-Catholicism, in one form or another, has been an English characteristic since the Reformation and was especially marked in the nineteenth century. It rests upon three fundamental ideas: that of the Protestant Constitution [of 1689], that of the Norman Yoke, and that of Providentialism."²⁴ In other words, anti-Catholicism is a long-standing vestige of the reformation in England and the continuing fear of (yet another) French invasion.

III. Why Are There Abbeys or Convents in Gothic Novels?

When Henry VIII seized Catholic monasteries and abbeys for the aggrandizement of his own treasury and for the benefit of his political supporters, the act was viewed by Catholics as a "sacrilege" and a desecration of holy property. It was also a sort of primitive plundering in the manner of the old Viking raiders, an act that recalled the Gothic invasions on the Roman Empire during the fifth century. It is signifi-

23. Susan Griffin, *Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 7.

24. *Ibid.*; Denis G. Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 2. E. R. Norman, *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968) distinguishes between British anti-Catholicism, which "was chauvinistic and almost general" in its tone and Continental anti-Catholicism, which reflected "varying class and regional discontents" (20).

cant that Horace Walpole called himself a "Protestant Goth," while referring to Catholicism as "Superstition's papal gloom," but it is also worth noting that he himself was fascinated with Catholic ritual and descended from the Jesuit Henry Walpole, executed in 1595 (McWhir, 37). The gothic, much like *The Castle of Otranto* itself, seeks simultaneously to exploit and condemn superstition. Walpole's case is particularly interesting, though, because he was familiar with Henry Spelman's *History of Sacrilege* (1698), a book that discussed the fates—including supernatural penalties—of twenty-four families that had profited from moving into former monasteries that had been seized by Henry VIII during the Dissolution. According to Spelman, all but two of the monasteries had "flung out their Owners with their Names . . . by grievous Accidents and Misfortunes."²⁵ As Allison Shell has noted, the Walpole family at Houghton is one of the "good" families that Spelman discusses, one that did not profit from seizing holy property and defaming it in "sacrilege"; but his neighbors in this area included "the named and shamed"—those who "walked in a landscape where certain buildings and parcels of land were thought to carry God's curse" (35). Walpole may have intellectually sided with those who usurped church property, but there is clearly an approach-avoidance dance that we can see enacted in *Castle of Otranto*, and certainly we hear alternately his attraction and repulsion to Catholicism in his letters. Writing to the Reverend William Cole (July 12, 1778), Walpole reveals his ambivalence:

Church and presbytery are human nonsense invented by knaves to govern fools. Church and kirk are terms for monopolies. Exalted notions of church matters are contradictions in terms to the lowliness and humility of the gospel. There is nothing sublime but the Divinity. Nothing is sacred but as His work. A tree or a brute stone is more respectable as such, than a mortal called an archbishop, or an edifice called a church, which are the puny and perishable productions of men. Calvin and Wesley had just the same views as the Popes; power and wealth, their objects. I abhor both. . . . P.S. I like Popery, as well as you, and

25. Allison Shell, *Oral Culture and Catholicism in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 35.

have shown I do. I like it as I do chivalry and romance. They all furnish one with ideas and visions. . . . A Gothic church or convent fill one with romantic dreams—but for the mysterious, the Church in the abstract, it is a jargon that means nothing or a great deal too much, and I reject it and its apostles from Athanasius to Bishop Keene.²⁶

Interestingly it is the buildings that are the sources for a chivalry-inflected aesthetic that Walpole so admires, while he professes nothing but contempt for all religions, Protestant as well as Catholic; however, his vicious attacks on the scheming monks in his only gothic drama, *The Mysterious Mother* (1768), suggests otherwise. There it is the monks who are scheming to seize the property of an aristocratic woman—a neat trick of historical sleight of hand that displaces the victims into victimizers.

This play is frequently discussed as the first gothic drama in England, but it circulated only in manuscript form and was never publicly performed during Walpole's life. *The Mysterious Mother* is a very strange work in which the Countess of Narbonne, a grieving mother who has just lost her husband, decides to employ the medieval "bed trick" and take the place of her son's mistress in his bed (and even more perversely, on the night that she learns of her husband's death in a hunting accident). She bears her son's child, a daughter named Adeliza, only to learn sixteen years later that the girl, living in her castle as her young "ward," has fallen in love with Edmund, her father/brother, and intends to marry him. The countess is forced to confess her crime immediately after learning of the intended marriage, and she and her family are destroyed as a result. Edmund rushes to death in battle, the daughter enters a convent, and the mother stabs herself while her estates appear to be confiscated by the monks Martin and Benedict, who have had their eyes on them for quite some time.

26. Martin Kallich, *Horace Walpole* (New York: Twayne, 1971), 12. For a self-professed "Protestant Goth," Walpole chose a strange motto to be painted in Gothic letters on the ceiling of his library at Strawberry Hill: *fari quae sentiat* ("Do what you want to do"). *Horace Walpole's Correspondence with The Rev. William Cole*, eds. W. S. Lewis and A. Dayle Wallace (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), 99–100. Shell (189 n37) has observed that there was a clear anti-Catholic slant to some of the publications printed by other writers at Walpole's private press (e.g., Hannah More's *Bishop Bonner's Ghost*, 1789).

Cited by Radcliffe, Byron, and Melville in their own works, and reprinted by Walter Scott in 1811, the drama had a sort of cult status among gothicists and was recognized as “creating the paradigmatic Gothic drama of internecine family conflict and sexual depravity” according to its modern editor Frederick Frank.²⁷ In many ways the drama is best understood as a throwback to Sophocles’s *Oedipus* or Euripides’s *Hippolytus* or such Restoration tragedies as John Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* (1633) or John Dryden’s *Don Sebastian* (1689). Walpole, in a postscript written to accompany the play, claimed that the events depicted were based on two historical incidents, one in England and one in France, although he chose to present his play “at the dawn of the reformation; consequently the strength of mind in the countess may be supposed to have borrowed aid from other sources, besides those she found in her own understanding” (252–53).

But the Countess of Narbonne’s “strength of mind” is precisely what is at question throughout the tragedy. When she is forced to explain herself to her son Edmund, she privileges both her body and her imagination as the reasons for her act of incest. Claiming that her husband had been “detain’d from my bed” for eighteen months, she asserts that when he finally was delivered, dead at her doorstep, “I rav’d—the storm of disappointed passions / Assail’d my reason, fever’d all my blood. . . . Guilt rush’d into my soul—my fancy saw thee / Thy father’s image” (5: 6; 43–63). This overlaying of her husband’s face on the son’s is a highly spectral way of recalling the uncanniness of the past and present, a technique that Walpole also used in *The Castle of Otranto*. This scene presents the female body as an unruly and irrational instrument at the mercy of the mind’s fevered constructions—or is the mind at the mercy of the body? Is the Countess a sexual deviant, a ravening, lustful aristocrat who would use her own son to sate her appetites, or is she a manifestation of a failed buffered self, a modern subject who loses control of herself so thoroughly that she is powerless and forced to wreak havoc on her family and the larger society?

In fact, the drama can more accurately be seen as persistently misogynistic (“Artful woman!” says Benedict, “Thou subtle emblem of

27. Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story and The Mysterious Mother: A Tragedy*, ed. Frederick S. Frank (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2003), 26. All quotations from the play will be taken from this edition.

thy sex, compos'd / Of madness and deceit" [241]) and blatantly anti-Catholic, with the monks Benedict and Martin using supernatural stories to terrify the secret sin out of the Countess: "I nurse her in new horrors; from her tenants / To fancy visions, phantoms; and report them. / She mocks their fond credulity—but trust me, / Her memory retains their coloring" (184). But when he sees that he cannot use omens, signs, dreams, or superstitions to intimidate the countess to publicly confess her sin, Father Benedict begins to despair. Fearing that the countess is sympathetic to the cause of the Waldensian heretics, he determines to destroy her by exposing her secret sin. Later he praises those soldiers of the church who have successfully burned the Waldensian heretics at the stake (222; 238–39). In his postscript to the drama, Walpole justifies his creation of the villainous Benedict, claiming that his purpose was "to divide the indignation of the audience, and, to intercept some of it from the Countess. Nor will the blackness of his character appear extravagant, if we call to mind the crimes committed by catholic churchmen, when the reformation not only provoked their rage, but threatened them with total ruin" (254). In other words, Walpole's dramatic strategy was one of bifurcated demonization: both sexualized mothers and greedy Catholic monks are "othered" and condemned as monstrosities, both atavistic forms that the British Protestant imaginary has to reject and punish in order to move into a modern and secular nation free from such powerful threats.

In a similar vein, it is worth mentioning William Shenstone's "The Ruin'd Abbey; or, The Effects of Superstitions" (ca. 1750), a poem that has been recognized as participating in the agenda of "Whig triumphalism," the necessary precondition of which is the erasure of Catholicism from the landscape through the eradication of her monasteries. No longer monuments to the "pride of ancient days," the monasteries now are merely visual stimuli, picturesque ruins "to glad the sons / Of George's reign, reserv'd for fairer times!" (555–56). Anna Laetitia Aikin Barbauld (1743–1825), author of the early essay on gothic aesthetics, "On the Pleasures Derived from the Objects of Terror" (1773), also

combines her anti-Catholic sentiments with a meditation on ruins to produce the following fairly extraordinary passage:

I happened the other day to take a solitary walk amongst the venerable ruins of an old Abbey. The stillness and solemnity of the place were favourable to thought, and naturally led me to a train of ideas relative to the scene; when, like a good protestant, I began to indulge a secret triumph in the ruin of so many structures which I had always considered as the haunts of ignorance and superstition. "Ye are fallen," said I, "ye dark and gloomy mansions of mistaken zeal, where the proud priest and lazy monk fattened upon the riches of the land, and crept like vermin from their cells to spread their poisonous doctrines through the nation, and disturb the peace of kings. . . . See how the pure light of heaven is clouded by the dim glass of the arched window, stained with the gaudy colours of monkish tales and legendary fiction; fit emblem how reluctantly they admitted the fairer light of truth amidst these dark recesses, and how much they have debased its genuine luster! The low cells, the long and narrow aisles, the gloomy arches, the damp and secret caverns which wind beneath the hollow ground, far from impressing on the mind the idea of the God of truth and love, seem only fit for those dark places of the earth in which are the habitations of cruelty. These mossy stones and scattered reliques of the vast edifice . . . produce emotions of mingled dread and exultation. Farewel [*sic*], yet one venerated seat! Enough of you remains, and may it always remain, to remind us from what we have escaped, and make posterity for ever thankful for this fairer age of liberty and light."²⁸

28. William Shenstone, "The Ruin'd Abbey," *Minor English Poets 1660-1780*, Vol. 4, ed. Alexander Chalmers and David P. French (New York: Blom, 1967), 554-55. For a discussion of the poem, see Raymond D. Tubleson, *Catholicism in the English Protestant Imagination: Nationalism, Religion, and Literature, 1660-1745* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 197-201. For a fuller discussion of the political context of the poem, see Donald Stewart, "Political Ruins: Gothic Sham Ruins and the '45," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 55 (1996): 400-411. "On Monastic Institutions," *The Works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld with a Memoir by Lucy Aikin*, vol. 2 (London: Longman et al., 1825), 195-96. This essay, as well as its broader anti-Catholic context, is perceptively

For all the venom in this passage, it is not out of character for the period, and certainly it is interesting that a number of British bourgeois women writers with ties to Unitarianism and Dissenting circles led the crusade against the residual evils of Catholicism, still visible in the landscape. Elizabeth Bonhôte (1744–1818), author of the gothic novel *Bungay Castle* (1796),²⁹ for instance, describes a “Romish Priest” in these terms:

What vanity and presumption! that man should suppose he can pardon the sins of others, and yet have the weight of so many on his own head! Why did he not stay in the land of superstition?—I should blush at seeing an Englishman on his knees to you,—more than I should at hearing a long catalogue of transgressions. It is more excusable to fall down before a crucifix—it might convey to the mind an idea of a great transaction.—But to kneel to such a man as that, is to pay adoration to the representative of folly and inconsistency—for the Romish priest is no better than his neighbours.—May the supplications of mankind be ever and only addressed to that Being who is placed far above all principality and power,—and might,—dominion—and every name that is named, not only in this world, but that which is to come.³⁰

Very similar in its anti-Catholic tone is the work of Mary Pilkington (1766–1839), novelist, translator, and author of approximately forty books. Most germane here, however, is her novel *The Accusing Spirit: or, De Courcy and Eglantine* (1802), one of the probable sources for Thomas DeQuincey’s *Klosterheim or The Masque* (1832), his own gothic novel. Somewhat absurdly, *The Accusing Spirit* presents the triumph of Calvinistic principles over Catholic indoctrination, despite being anachronistically set during the century before the birth of John Calvin.

analyzed by Robert Mighall, “History as Nightmare,” in *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History’s Nightmares* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1–26.

29. Elizabeth Bonhôte, *Bungay Castle* (London: Minerva Press, 1796).

30. Elizabeth Bonhôte, *The Rambles of Mr. Frankly, Published by His Sister*, vol. 1 (Dublin: Sleather et al., 1773), 67.

England passed a number of Catholic Relief Acts emancipating Catholics who owned property worth at least ten pounds, restoring some of their rights in the early 1800s. Then in 1829 England finally passed a bill that eliminated the old Test Acts and penal laws against Catholics. But this legislative emancipation did not quell the demonization of the Catholic in the popular British imaginary as they sought to cement their national identity. Catholics as potential and persistent threats were never far from the edges of besieged British consciousness. As late as 1824, Walter Scott was adding his voice to the issue, praising the novels of Ann Radcliffe for exposing the Catholic threat to the nation: "She selected the new and powerful machinery afforded her by the Popish religion, when established in its paramount superiority, and thereby had at her disposal monks, spies, dungeons, the mute obedience of the bigot, the dark and denominating spirit of the crafty priest,—all the thunders of the Vatican, and all the terrors of the Inquisition."³¹ For Scott, Catholicism continued to pose a political and nationalistic threat to Britain, and by the time John Henry Newman converted to Roman Catholicism in 1845, fear of a traitorous and sexually suspect faction within had increased yet again in Britain. This led to a new spate of anti-Jesuit and anticonvent literature.³²

With all of this evidence staring him in the face, the gothic aficionado Montague Summers blithely claimed in his *Gothic Quest* (1938) that "we are bound to allow that here and there a distinct 'anti-Roman' feeling is to be found in the pages of certain writers, [but] it would be foolish to insist upon any militant protestantism of the John Kensit and

31. Walter Scott, "Mrs. Ann Radcliffe," in *The Lives of Eminent Novelists and Dramatists*, (London: Frederick Warne, 1887), 556.

32. Patrick O'Malley (*Catholicism, Sexual Deviance, and Victorian Gothic Culture* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006]), has noted that "sexual anxiety and the specters of homosexuality, seduction, rape, adultery, and prostitution are a part of the motivation behind the anti-Catholic movements and discourses of the nineteenth century, but they are only a part" (24). A similar reading in regard to Walpole is offered by George Haggerty ("The Horrors of Catholicism: Religion and Sexuality in Gothic Fiction" in *Queer Gothic* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006], 63–83), who sees Matilda's accidental murder in the chapel by her father as an example of the "subtle connection between the hetero-normativity of sexual violence and the patriarchal law of the father upon which Catholicism insists" (64).

Chiniquy school in the Gothic novelists.”³³ And for almost two decades this pronouncement silenced critical examinations of the obvious ideological agenda of most gothic fiction. But by the latter part of the last century, however, historians of the gothic began again to investigate the gothic’s complicity in nationalistic attempts to scapegoat Catholics.

IV. Why Is Death So Prominent in Gothic Novels?

Within the “background” of the popular cultural imagination, a variety of attempts were made to resolve the metaphysical split between the material and transcendent realms that had occurred during the Enlightenment period. One of the first explanatory challenges was the 1755 earthquake in Lisbon. While Rousseau saw the earthquake as a product of urban development and human hubris, others came forward to suggest purely natural causes as well as the laws that governed the immanent realm.³⁴ The disappearance of God as an explanatory mechanism was, of course, the subject of a good deal of debate but ultimately gave way to the rise of a growing conviction or anxiety that anything in the material world that could not be explained by recourse to either a beneficent God or to natural laws had to have its source in the continuing realm of the demonic and magical. This contentious intellectual “background” actually recalls Tzvetan Todorov’s definitions of the fantastic, the uncanny, and the marvelous:

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know . . . there [can] occur an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination—and the laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality—but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to

33. Montague Summers, *The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel* (London: Fortune, 1938), 195.

34. Rita Goldberg, “Voltaire, Rousseau, and the Lisbon Earthquake,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 13 (1989): 1–20.

us. Either the devil is an illusion, an imaginary being; or else he really exists, precisely like other living beings—with this reservation, that we encounter him infrequently.³⁵

And presumably we find him only in the pages of fantastic literature. For Todorov, the “fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. . . . The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event” (25). Although he distinguishes the fantastic from the uncanny and the marvelous by claiming that they ultimately offer resolutions governed either by natural laws (the uncanny) or the supernatural (the marvelous), Todorov finally sees the uncanny as concerned with events that can be explained only by “the laws of reason, but which are, in one way or another, incredible, extraordinary, shocking, singular, disturbing or unexpected, and which thereby provoke in the character and in the reader a reaction similar to that which works of the fantastic have made familiar” (46).

The gothic imaginary arose within this impasse, in the growing confusion that existed between the realms of reason and faith, while the gothic aesthetic can be read on some levels as an epistemological attempt to explain how the immanent world of nature could have displaced the divine as an explanatory mechanism, but not the demonic. But rather than force people to choose exclusive allegiance to either the immanent order or the transcendent, the rise of ambivalent secularization actually allowed modern Europeans to inhabit an imaginative space in which both the material (science and reason) and the supernatural (God and the devil) coexisted as equally powerful explanatory paradigms. This uneasy coexistence of the immanent and the transcendent can be seen throughout the gothic corpus, particularly in those works in which a ghost speaks to warn and protect the living (the murdered Elvira appearing to her daughter in *The Monk*) or provides the missing clue to the dramatic mystery on stage or in the text (Evelina’s two appearances to her daughter Angela in *The Castle Spectre* [1797] or the bleeding nun who haunts Lorenzo until she receives a decent burial in *The Monk*).

35. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic*, trans. Richard Howard (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1973), 25.

Other examples include the devil who meddles very directly and disastrously in the affairs of the living (Jacques Cazotte's *Le Diable amoureux* [1772]; Lewis's *The Monk*; or Charles Maturin's *Bertram; or the Castle of St. Alodbrand* [1816]; and *Melmoth the Wanderer* [1820]). All of these examples, in fact, illustrate the growing Protestant concern as traced by Nathan Johnstone, who has argued that during the English Reformation the concern of Protestants was to "emphasise the Devil's power of temptation, especially his ability to enter directly into the mind and plant thoughts within it that led people to sin. . . . Subversion was now the Devil's greatest threat—of the pious aspirations of the individual Christian, and of the godly nation as a whole."³⁶

By way of historical background, it is important to note that by 1780 the "philosophic" movement in France had built an extremely strong case against religion as a species of "superstition" and the prop on which a corrupt political apparatus rested. Proponents of a variety of elite Enlightenment ideologies—scientific experimentation, mechanistic philosophy, materialism, naturalism—challenged the now largely lower-class animistic conception of the universe that had been constructed on traditional Christian beliefs. In their attempt to establish a new society based on the realities of matter or the organic cycle of birth, growth, and decay, these epistemologies endorsed the scientific principle and the notion that the processes of life and matter occurred without recourse to a belief in spirit or the supernatural. But as various theorists of the decline of magic and superstition have noted, one cannot simply attribute the changes in beliefs that happened at this time to the success of the scientific revolution, the increase in urbanism, or the spread of various Protestant self-help ideologies. As Keith Thomas has concluded, "If magic is to be defined as the employment of ineffective techniques to allay anxiety when effective ones are available, then we must recognize that no society will ever be free from it."³⁷ Indeed, as Thomas notes, explanatory supernatural theories were rejected by intellectuals throughout most of England well before effective techniques to explain medical and natural events were developed. And

36. Nathan Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2.

37. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribner's, 1971), 668.

it is precisely in this historical gap—between the decline of magic and the rise of science—that the gothic imaginary emerges. Historical, political, religious, and cultural influences were all at play as this culture faced the many challenges of modernization and secularization. It should not surprise us that the gothic emerged, complete with an anti-Catholic agenda and a convoluted quasi-religious function. It seems to have arisen to solve specific historical and religious conflicts that were apparently resolved at least a century earlier. And yet the gothic continues to be produced, and it still forces its readers to confront not simply their immediate historical condition but their own fears about sex, death, and the afterlife. As such, it baffles and seduces its readers today, just as it did in 1764.