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# Mysteries of a London Convent [supplemental material]

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# Mysteries of a London Convent, by William Heard Hilliard.

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### MLA Citation

Hillyard, William Heard. "Mysteries of a London Convent." *The London Miscellany*. New Series no. 18 [13th Oct. 1866] —New Series no. 26 [8th Dec. 1866].

### MLA Citation from the Gothic Archive

Hillyard, William Heard. *Mysteries of a London Convent*. Published 1866. E-Publications Marquette. The Gothic Archive, Marquette University, Wisconsin.  
[http://epublications.marquette.edu/english\\_gothic/31/](http://epublications.marquette.edu/english_gothic/31/) Accessed 1/16/14. Web.

### Full Title

*The Mysteries of a London Convent*.

### Summary

At the first, "Mysteries of London Convent" is a story riddled with suspicion concerning clergy. There is great surprise among the local townspeople about the institution of the new priest as the confessor of Sir Richard Castleton and his niece and ward, Blanche Castleton. Unbeknownst to Blanche, Sir Richard has ulterior motives for bringing this new

priest into his household for the very reason that he intends for Blanche to be sequestered to a convent if she does not marry the man of his choosing, Lord Arundell.

Blanche cannot and does not marry Lord Arundell because of her secret relationship with D'Arcy Egerton, a noble of ambiguous ancestry who is perceived as a 'heretic' by the Catholic Church. Because of his religious status, Blanche and D'Arcy's relationship is kept secret via a vis private communication through letters. Since Sir Richard does not know at the first about this secret relationship, he is willing to give Blanche her options of marrying his chosen or a life in the convent. However, once both Sir Richard and the new confessor, Father Belville, discover the presence of D'Arcy, Blanche is immediately given an ultimatum. Trusting Father Belville's advice to seek shelter in the convent in hopes that he will release her later, Blanche is taken to the convent where her aunt is the mother superior.

In the midst of Blanche's tale, a young clerk, Josh Whistler, is at work with a loan operator, Silas Morpew. Josh does not trust his employer but keeps his job for purposes of necessity. Father Belville has actually been in conversation with Morpew about the acquisition of Blanche's dowry as the Castleton heir. However, Morpew turns against Father Belville and leaves him trapped in a dungeon below his work establishment. Josh ends up rescuing Father Belville, and he finds that Father Belville is now indebted to him for his services of care.

At the convent Blanche is about to take the veil but is rescued by her lover, D'Arcy, and the two flee the convent to marry. When Sir Castleton discovers their tryst, he ambushes the couple and takes Blanche back to the convent where the nuns deal with her as a heretic and despot of the faith. Once again, D'Arcy seeks out to find Blanche, but this time Josh Whistler is his companion. The two hatch a plan, and Josh eventually goes undercover as a monk in the adjoining monastery to the convent where Blanche is now kept prisoner. The last half of the story details the crude and tortuous practices in both the monastery and convent, all leading up to the eventual reinstatement of the lovers, Blanche and D'Arcy, in sacred matrimony.

## Constellation of Knowledge/Historical Context

Published in *The London Miscellany* and written by William Heard Hillyard (1811-1870), this 22 chapter story must have been considered a guaranteed blockbuster with the newspaper's intended reading audience. *The Mysteries of a London Convent* relies most immediately on the sensational categories that are delineated in *The Mysteries of the Inquisition*, as well as another and earlier penny dreadful production with an almost identical plot, Smiff's *The New Mysteries of London* (1858), written in imitation of Reynolds's blockbuster *The Mysteries of London* (1844-48). *The Mysteries of a London Convent* is actually the rarest one of all, available in only one copy worldwide: Leceister University Library, England. Hillyard was also the author of an earlier work in 1848, *Catalina; or, The Spaniard's Revenge: A Romance*.

## Key Words

### Female Sexuality

As the locus of female sexuality in the story, Blanche Castleton has a limited if nonexistent authority over her sexuality. As a result, then, she is entrenched in the machinations of the male protectors and guardians of the story for matters concerning her sexuality. As her legal guardian, Sir Richard arranges a marriage for Blanche while simultaneously Father Belville nefariously plots to install Blanche at the convent adjoining his monastery, so he can make regular visits of a sexual nature to her. Although D'Arcy Egerton is the male protagonist of the story, set up as the noble male hero, he does not offer Blanche any freedom from patriarchal establishments. On the contrary, he merely allows her the opportunity to exist via marriage in the less degrading options available to her by rescuing her from the convent and Sir Richard's guardianship.

### Purity

After secretly marrying D'Arcy Egerton and consummating their marriage, Blanche is punished for defying the vows of the Catholic Church. Even though her marriage was legal according to the state, it was not performed in the Catholic Church under Catholic approval. Therefore, Blanche's sexual purity is regarded as defiled because of her actions; her punishment is imprisonment below the convent and the murder of her child from her and Egerton's union.

### Religion

The laws and precepts set as antagonistic are the religious codes and mores of the Roman Catholic Church. It is not the Christian doctrines that are set up as an evil but rather the rigid dogma that the Catholic Church has instigated in the name of Christian values but is distinctly a human invention for selfish means.

### Sin

Actions outside of the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church are considered sins, and are viciously punished. Although Blanche 'sins' against the Roman Catholic Church (i.e., God) by running away with D'Arcy Egerton, her actions in a protestant light are considered noble because her vows were in fact taken under duress and not of her own volition.

### Romance Paradigm

As the true doppelganger of the Romance paradigm, the young lovers in this Gothic Romance, Blanche and D'Arcy, are perpetually thwarted by an 'angry old man' figure that is to say, Sir Richard Castleton as well as the lustful Father Belville.

### Bibliography of Related Information

Hillyard, William. *Catalina; or, The Spaniard's Revenge: A Romance*. London: John Dicks, 1848.