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The question of the Gothic's use of and attitude toward Catholicism has been increasingly contentious in recent years, with literary historians claiming that its prominence as a thematic concern provides a test case for distinguishing whether or not the Gothic should be understood as an ideology or as an aesthetic mode not primarily invested in ideological issues at all. By examining this critical issue, I argue for an understanding of Gothic as primarily a form of propagandistic fiction invested in nationalistic Whig and Protestant ideologies. The article also builds on recent biographical and critical work on two British gothic novelists who both specialized in writing anti-Catholic gothic novels during the heyday of the genre and, not coincidentally, the popular agitation against the Catholic emancipation movement. William-Henry Ireland's two most well-known gothic novels, *The Abbess* (1799) and *Gondez the Monk* (1807), as well as Thomas Isaac Horsley Curties's novel *The Monk of Udolpho* (1807) are placed in a wider historical, religious, and cultural context in order to analyze the persistent use and meaning of Catholic themes in the gothic genre.

INSERT FIGURE ONE

Figure One: From Matthew G. Lewis, *The Monk* (London: Purkess, 1848). Reproduced courtesy of Justin Gilbert.

I. INTRODUCTION

I begin with an illustration from a penny dreadful reprint of Matthew Lewis's vehemently anti-Catholic novel, *The Monk* (1796), because it depicts so clearly some of the hysterical energy that

was brought to the issue of religion in what was supposedly a progressive era. Representing the climactic moment in the text when the Franciscan monk Ambrosio seizes his sister Antonia by the hair just after raping her in the catacombs beneath his Madrid monastery, the illustration spoke to the general public's pervasive fears about the presence of an increasing number of Catholic clergy in a Britain that was by this time thoroughly invested in a form of nationalist Protestantism.¹ This scene of a sadistic monk torturing and murdering a young innocent woman (and in this case, unbeknownst to him, his long-lost sister) was continually reprinted in the penny press throughout the century, while depictions of *The Monk*'s perverse and violent attacks on his mother and sister were persistently popular tropes in gothic texts, so frequently repeated that one marvels at how the populace could not have been quickly sated with their depiction. But quickly sated they do not seem to have been. Variations on this representation have continued to appear in hundreds of literary texts for over the past two hundred years, seemingly in direct contradiction to claims recently made by Franco Moretti. Using more than one thousand novels from several different countries published over a 160 year period, Moretti asserts that genres coalesce in fairly regular patterns, and that they shift, absorbing some features of the earlier and most popular genres, about every 25 years (20-22). Relying on the theories of Karl Mannheim, he claims that this phenomenon seems to occur because of the changing tastes of readers, or, as Mannheim asserts, as generations change, genres change (21). But Moretti clearly would like to fine tune this theory, stating that "some kind of generational mechanism seems the best way to account for the regularity of the novelistic cycle—but 'generation' is itself a very questionable concept. Clearly, we must do better" (22). I would concur, because generations of readers have continued to be intrigued and entertained by tales of lecherous monks, evil or persecuted nuns, dank torture chambers in haunted ruined abbeys, wily Jesuits, and the question is, why?

The immediate historical context for the development of the gothic novel present us with a few key dates for ensuring the continuance of what Jonathan Clark has termed the “British Protestant confessional state”: 1779, when the Anti-Popery riots broke out in Scotland early in the year and then June to September which saw the failed attempt of France and Spain to launch a second Armada against England; 1780, when the Gordon Riots in London resulted in the deaths of close to 300 people while 20 were hanged in the aftermath; and 1791, when Parliament passed a Catholic Relief Act that gave Catholics the same status as Protestant dissenters and awarded Catholic tenant farmers the right to vote in Ireland. Finally, 1796 saw 14,000 French troops under the command of General Hoche land in Ireland, hoping to use those shores as a base to invade England, while a similar doomed attempt by the French in league with the Irish to push England out of Ireland occurred in 1798. Ann Radcliffe’s gothic novels begin to appear in early 1791, and the first full tide of novels about mad monks, dank convent cells, forced religious vows, and Inquisitions continued to dominate literary works for the next two decades, culminating around 1820. As all of the primary materials associated with these various events and issues is extremely extensive, I have chosen to focus on two authors who were thoroughly invested in what I am calling the gothic ideology, that is, the fictional fixation on portrayals of the corrupt nun, the evil monk, the Inquisition, and the gothic ruined abbey.²

There has always been a good deal of controversy about the presence of religion and religious tropes in Anglo-American and European gothic textualities. On one hand, critics like M. M. Tarr, Irene Bostrom, Maurice Lévy, Victor Sage, and Susan Griffin have claimed that the gothic was thoroughly invested in a crude form of anti-Catholicism that fed the lower class’ prejudices against the passage of a variety of Catholic Relief Acts that had been pending in Parliament since 1788. On the other hand, Maria Purves has recently claimed that by focusing

only on a “handful of works” (208) that do not represent the full range of gothic writing, literary historians have failed to recognize the “Burkean counter-revolutionary discourse in the 1790s [which] made possible a favourable opinion of Catholicism as a strategically important part of England’s heritage within the context of pro-Catholic sympathy in the form of the incremental Catholic Relief legislation of the late eighteenth century and England’s national support of the French clergy” (204). In this position she is following the lead of Warren Hunting Smith (1934: 22) and David Mathew, who argued in 1936 that “the French Revolution was of great benefit to Catholicism in England by bringing back the schools and colleges, so long established abroad, to English soil” (162). But in fact the Gordon riots and the reaction to the Irish Act of Union in 1800 make it patently obvious that there was strong if not hysterical sentiment against any attempt to loosen the restrictions on Catholic emancipation every step of the way.

As I have argued elsewhere, Gothic literature can best be understood as part of the Western secularization process or perhaps it is more accurate to say that it is cultural work that reveals the drive toward secularization on the part of the elites and middle classes throughout Europe, from roughly 1780 to 1850.³ But in order to modernize and secularize, the British Protestant imaginary needed an “other” against which it could define itself as a culture and a nation with distinct boundaries. In Gothic literature, a reactionary, demonized, and feudal Catholicism is created in order to stand in opposition to the modern Protestant individual who then alternately combats and flirts with this uncanny double in a series of cultural productions that we recognize as gothic novels. There is no question that the bourgeoisie of Enlightenment Europe sought to embrace the secular codes of modernism as they understood them: self-control, commercial enterprise, education and the values of literacy, nationalism, legal rights, and civic values like “virtue” and “reason,” and increasingly the novel developed to reify this ethos. But

the chapbooks and popular media that developed to feed the interests and needs of a growing class of barely literate people were another matter altogether. These productions were steeped in a much earlier attitude toward gender, politics, religion, and morality, or what has been defined somewhat contentiously as the “Counter-Enlightenment” ethos (see Berlin; Garrard). Indeed, the world-view depicted in the chapbooks and popular novels was an anachronism even in its own time, and now by studying them we have a unique perspective on a lingering pre-modern consciousness, entranced with visions of chivalric, medievalist-inflected England doing battle with the forces of Spain, France, and a persistently Catholic “other” within their own midst. The lower-class gothic imaginary has remained consistently familiar, with an intense fear of a secularized devil-figure who has, since the sixteenth century, gone by the name of “Abbess,” the Jesuit, Inquisitor, or Monk. When the supernatural died its long and slow death in full public view, the lower-class imaginary sought to keep the demonic and the divine alive in all of their magnificent power. They created discourses that placed demonic nuns and mysterious monks in landscapes that were charged with the fallen grandeur of the Catholic Church: ruined abbeys, secret tribunals, and crumbling cathedrals. When the dust settled, the Protestant individual emerged, a bit worse for the wear, but willing (it would seem) to face the daunting challenges and mixed opportunities that literacy, democracy, and liberalism presented.

Although there has been a lively debate over whether the Gothic is an ideology or should be understood as an aesthetic,⁴ there is no denying the fact that hundreds of gothic novels present what I have identified as a “gothic ideology”: an intense religious anxiety, nay a hysteria, produced by the aftershocks of the Protestant reformation, the Catholic Counter-Reformation, and the dynastic upheavals produced by both events in England, Germany, and France and played out in hundreds of texts published throughout Europe from the mid-eighteenth century

through 1890 and largely intended for the lower and “middling” classes of readership.⁵ This ideology is part and parcel of a larger Western secularization process that swept across Europe from roughly 1700-1900, indeed we are still in the midst of sorting out our intellectual allegiances to the Enlightenment: scientific approaches and rationalism continually vying with more traditional systems of belief even today. Waves of textuality arose from these shocks and much of it has come to be characterized as gothic, both in its subject matter (a focus on deceptive priests, perverse or frustrated nuns, ruined abbeys, and the dark and dank torture chambers of the Inquisition) and in its literary techniques (“type scenes,”⁶ aporia, analepsis, paranoia and intense suspense, multiple and overlapping narratives and characters, abrupt dénouements, doubled and flat characters, propagandizing via moralizing, and a privileging of melodramatic morality).

Catholicism has long been in the cross-hairs of the Enlightenment project since the era’s origins, however one may choose to date that event (the period of the Reformation, the writings of Hobbes, Locke, Mandeville, or the works of Voltaire and Diderot). Horkheimer and Adorno have observed on this issue:

The particular mythology which the Western Enlightenment, even in the form of Calvinism, had to get rid of was the Catholic doctrine of the *ordo* [order, rules] and the popular pagan religion which still flourished under it. The goal of bourgeois philosophy was to liberate men from all this. But the liberation went further than its humane progenitors had conceived. The unleashed market economy was both the actual form of reason and the power which destroyed reason. The Romantic reactionaries only expressed what the bourgeois themselves experienced: that in their world freedom tended toward organized anarchy. The Catholic counterrevolution proved itself right as against the Enlightenment, just as the Enlightenment had shown itself to be right in regard to Catholicism. (90)

While Horkheimer and Adorno fix their sights on an analysis of the writings of Sade and, in particular, his porno-gothic novel *Juliette* (1797-1801) as a sustained attack on Catholicism, Pope Pius VI, and the convent system in the name of “reason,” in fact, the gothic is engaged in a

larger de-sacralizing process that in many ways owes its linguistic and thematic origins to the libertine, Enlightenment project.

When John Henry Newman attempted to describe the nature of British anti-Catholicism, he resorted to a list of largely lower-class reading materials, claiming that the tradition could best be understood as a cultural practice based on

nursery stories, school stories, public-house stories, club-house stories, drawing-room stories, platform stories, pulpit stories;—a tradition of newspapers, magazines, reviews, pamphlets, romances, novels, poems, and light literature of all kinds, literature of the day;—a tradition of selections from the English classics, bits of poetry, passages of history, sermons, chance essays, extracts from books of travel, anonymous anecdotes, lectures on prophecy, statements and arguments of polemical writers. (88)

Although he made this observation in 1851, the same statement could have been made one hundred years earlier, and certainly a central component of the tradition by the middle of the nineteenth century would have been the popularity and prominence of the gothic novel. It would appear that fictional works imaginatively inhabit an historical milieu that is considerably different from (and earlier than) the one in which they are actually produced (*pace* Moretti). The gothic ideology became a way of remediating textuality and was almost self-generating as an early species of print technology. With the invention of the Stanhope iron printing press in 1798, the mechanization of printing accelerated exponentially and a veritable flood of textuality appeared, causing Wordsworth in 1800 to complain about “this degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation” (Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*: 2). The gothic ideology not only aimed to quench this outrageous thirst, but it functioned as a form of fictional mystification, characterized by extreme religious ambivalence and demonization of the Catholic clergy, practices, and properties, and it is the dominant ideological position taken by a large number of British gothic works in what is known as the Enlightenment period. Strange as it may seem, this culture could not resist

haunting itself with the spectre of a clergy they had successfully driven out of the country more than two hundred years earlier, while they wandered in their imaginations around ruined cloisters that they themselves had destroyed.

II. THE AGENDA OF WILLIAM-HENRY IRELAND

Famous (or perhaps the more accurate term is infamous) as the forger of a variety of spurious Shakespeare documents, William-Henry Ireland was one of the most prolific of the anti-Catholic gothicists, penning *The Abbess*, *Gondez the Monk*, as well as *The Catholic*, an historical novel about the diabolical Catholic conspirators behind the gunpowder plot, sure to rile up nationalistic emotions and recall the near disaster that Catholics, in league with Jesuits, had plotted for the British Protestant nation. It seems that after Ireland was exposed as a fraud by Edmond Malone, the Shakespeare scholar, he made a bet with a friend that he could write a “novel of genius,” and that wager resulted in his first gothic novel, *The Abbess* (1799). What is most interesting about this literary sideshow is the fact that a forger intent on redeeming his reputation would turn to penning a number of anti-Catholic gothic novels as a sure way of winning esteem and acceptance from his countrymen. Characterized by his modern editor as a “natural marketer” (Kahan ed. of *Gondez* 10), there is no question that the decision to turn to this particular type of gothic novel was a calculated one both to earn money and to try to redeem his sullied reputation and political bona fides. Although Ireland kept producing literary works and hoping for public forgiveness, he never found it. As late as 1823 James Boaden, gothic dramatist and theater historian, wrote to Ireland to inform him that his crimes were beyond the pale: “You must be aware, sire, of the enormous crime you committed against the divinity of Shakespeare. Why, the act, sir, was

nothing short of sacrilege; it was precisely the same thing as taking the holy chalice from the altar, and ***** therein!” (qtd. Kahan ed. of *Gondez* 18). The religious imagery here is particularly apt, for Ireland sought to repair his sacrilegious act against Shakespeare, the literary “divinity,” by scapegoating the one population he knew his Protestant audience was most keen to see attacked and exposed: “the Catholic.” In these three novels, Ireland went to extremes to demonize Catholic figures, monks and nuns in particular, while also depicting in outlandish descriptions a variety of gothicized Catholic practices like the forced vows of a nun or a focus on the Inquisition, “which, instead of aiding the cause of innocence and justice, might be converted into the most diabolical engine of cruelty by any of its members, whose hidden motives might originate in hatred, malice, or even caprice” (*Gondez* 324).

One hardly knows what to make of the fact that literary critics of the gothic have virtually ignored the notorious Madre Vittoria Bracciano, anti-heroine of *The Abbess*, a novel that has been until recently given scant attention in the field of gothic studies.⁷ Steven Marcus has argued that “Roman Catholicism is a pornographer’s paradise...all priests are lechers, satyrs, and pimps, all nuns are concubines or lesbians of both” (62-3), while Tracy Fessenden believes that “the nun-as-prostitute figure is ubiquitous in Western cultures” (452). Neither of them, however, seems to be aware of Ireland’s notorious novel published in 1799, but it is, I think, an important and long over-looked text in the anti-Catholic gothic canon. It was so popular that it was pirated in 1801 by the American publisher, J. Sower and Butler of Baltimore, and then reprinted again in England in 1832 (*Abbess* 1974; xi). Set in Florence at the convent of Santa-Maria del Nova, the novel begins with a nod to one of the most persistent tropes in English gothic works with a Catholic theme: the visit by a young aristocrat to a convent in order to ogle the young novices. Because English nuns were driven out of the country and into convents in France, the low

countries, Portugal, and Spain, English tourists frequently stopped on their grand tours in order to look at them, on display, so to speak, behind the grilles of their convents, tantalizingly present but out of reach.⁸ On this particular occasion the hero, Conte Marcello Porta, stops in on the morning of the feast of the Annunciation to survey the scene, in particular the splendid display of relics “enshrined in gold and silver, ornamented with precious stones, which displayed the wealth of this convent” (45), another set-piece in the anti-Catholic arsenal. In the Protestant imagery, the display of relics, particularly saints’s bones contained in encrusted cases decorated with elaborate precious metals and gems, was a disgusting and wasteful form of primitive idolatry. Presiding above all of the pomp and wealth is the “commanding” figure of the Abbess, the “youngest of several daughters descended from one of the noblest families in Italy,” and “ill calculated to adorn” her religious habit: “every worldly feeling predominat[ed] in her heart....pride, cruelty, malice, and revenge; such were the passions that reigned triumphant o’er her mind. Her desires too were licentious, and with difficulty bridled” (46). This description reveals its ideological position very clearly: women would end up as frustrated maniacs ruling despotically over perverse same-sex domains if they were forced into convents because they could not be provided with dowries.

But if there is an evil abbess present, there is bound to be a good and long-suffering nun in close vicinity, this time named Maddalena Rosa Bertocci, who immediately becomes the love object of Marcello. And if there is a perverse abbess there also will be a crazed monk, her assistant in procuring sex-slaves. This particular monk, Ubaldo, is depicted as a masochist who kneels before the figure of the Virgin and begins to whip himself with the knotted rope that he wore around “his loins” (50), while later he is described as “the subtle monk Ubaldo, who wears religion’s outward cloak, to conceal the villainy of his heart” (127). When Marcello realizes that

Ubaldo is the Madre's pimp, he remembers this scene and wonders "what deceit must inhabit the bosom of him, who, while employed in fulfilling the most contemptuous office, could, in my presence, kneel before the image of the Virgin, and offer up his hypocritical prayers!" (91). Even more ominously, though, the monk invites Marcello into the convent late at night and Marcello quickly agrees, thinking that the invitation comes from his love interest, Maddalena, and that he will be rewarded with a secret visit to her chambers. The monk, however, demands that before they go any further, an oral promise, made under torture or threat of death, must be sworn by Marcello, to which he again foolishly and readily agrees. He swears on "the Lord God, his blessed Son, and the Immaculate Virgin" that he will never reveal "any circumstance relating to the conversation that shall pass between you" or the identity of the female he is to meet shortly (67).

As this is a three volume gothic novel, however, there are all manner of delays, many subplots involving friends and relatives, and an attempted attack under the portal of a monastery that is highly dependent on a similar scene in Radcliffe's *The Italian*. Maddalena has prescient dreams, just as do Antonia in *The Monk* or Adeline in *The Romance of the Forest*, in fact, this dream is almost a verbatim composite of those famous gothic dreams complete with walls hung with black velvet and the sight of an open coffin (80). Finally, Marcello is led to the secret chamber to meet a completely veiled woman whom he takes to be Maddalena. This woman dallies with him, offers her hand for kisses, sighs passionately, and finally "guide[s] his hand to her bosom. Her dress was thin, he felt the firm and beauteous breast that heaved beneath. The warmth communicated to his touch—his blood more fiercely boiled—with difficulty he contained his passion" (87). Unfortunately for him, this woman is the Madre, and the realization fills him with "horror" when she finally lifts her veil (88). The scene recalls the recognition

scene in which Lorenzo is confronted with the bleeding nun in *The Monk*, and, indeed, a number of the nuns who appear in gothic works are ancestors of this earlier folk tradition concerned with punishing nuns for wayward sexual interests. But Ireland's Madre is a more diabolical anti-heroine, a woman who has learned over many years how to lure men into the convent at night and then subject them to her all too hungry embraces on something that looks like an ecclesiastical casting couch.

I make this last observation because of the prolonged theatricality of the two seduction scenes. In the first visit to the Madre's chambers, we read in detail about her flirtatious attempts to lift her veil and reveal her face over and over again. And yet she stops several times, frustrating Marcello with her hesitations and confusion. When she does finally remove her veil, she is not the young and virtuous Maddalena he had been expecting, but a much older woman, figured as a phallic mother, a perverse, incestuous rapist of youth and normalcy: "His eyes, at that moment, fixed on the face of the Madonna, in the enchanting picture of Raphael. He thought her features were the exact counterpart of the beautiful boarder. Her eyes, from which crystal tears distilled, seemed bent on his countenance, with a look of mingled reproach and pity" (88-89). A series of confused and confusing textual, sexual, and psychic substitutions has occurred here: the Madre has substituted herself for the virgin Maddalena, her name notwithstanding, while the Raphael portrait of the Madonna substitutes for Maddalena, and all of this would have recalled very vividly for the contemporary reader the very similar scene of Rosario/Matilda's seduction of Ambrosio (using the same Raphael painting) in *The Monk*. But what this representation suggests in an over-determined manner extends beyond the surfaces here: for the British Protestant imaginary this scene is shocking because it conveys the sexualization and fetishization of the phallic mother figure in an incestuously threatening manner

(read: the whore of Babylon or the Roman Catholic Church).

But the Madre's conduct also embodies the middle-class dread and condemnation of the libertine code that operated in so many of these gothic texts, from the aristocratic seducers in Radcliffe's *Romance of the Forest* to the novels of Charlotte Dacre: *The Confessions of the Nun of St. Omer*, *Zofloya*, *The Libertine*, or *The Passions* and to the villains in her youthful acolyte Percy Shelley's two novellas: *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*. In this rhetorical set-piece, the Madre mouths the seduction scenario usually reserved for male libertines, making this scene even more threatening to the hapless Marcello: "You are, you shall be mine: 'tis true, the whining priest can never join us, but that will render our loves even more permanent. Love must be free as the rose-kissing zephyr, unshackled by any tie but that which flows voluntarily from its own bosom'" (90). All of this would have been very familiar to readers of the eighteenth-century libertine literary tradition, in which Lovelace danced around Clarissa or Mr B attempted to perform, albeit more clumsily, the same seduction of Pamela. But Ireland gives us something more diabolical than the typical secular seduction scene: he turns the scenario into a condemnation of the doctrine of clerical celibacy, stating that the practice is human and based, not on Christ's injunction, but on some pervert's notion of sadistic revenge for the disappointments of the flesh:

This life of celibacy was a human ordinance; pure nature shuddered at the dreadful act. It was a law, instituted perhaps by some great, some wretched man, who, satiated with the improper enjoyment of his vicious desires, retired, gloomy and discontented, to plan the wretchedness of thousands. But these human laws shall not influence me—my soul abhors this cheat, reared and concealed beneath the mask of piety. (90)

Marcello's response is astonishment. He stands dumb-founded before such "bold assertions," which, the Madre assures him, are held by all the other nuns, whether they dare to admit as much or not (90). It is this scene that causes me to assert that the novel is invested, not simply in an

amorphous gothic aesthetic that employs convents as picturesque scenery, but in a gothic ideology, a way of arguing against the primitive, hypocritical, antiquated system that was Catholicism in Europe and instead for a rational, Protestant Britain presided over by a rational religion characterized by reason and restraint.

The fateful night for yet another rendezvous finally arrives and Marcello this time is led to his meeting with the Madre by Sister Beatrice, yet another confidant and partner in crime with the Madre. A goblet filled with drugged wine awaits him, and he too quickly downs the contents. For all its notoriety, the most explicit sexual scene in *The Abbess* is tame by almost any standards:

he unconsciously threw himself on the couch, where the Madre was already seated. Her ivory arm immediately encircled his neck—the Comte’s head sunk, unresisting, on her snowy and palpitating bosom. The drugged wine, which he had imprudently drank, had it been taken in moderation, might have served to exhilarate his spirits; but he had outstepped the bounds of prudence, and youthful passion gained the better of his reason. What can be said?—the Madre was beautiful—and the Come was but a man—. (107)

After an evening filled with “the most affectionate caresses” (108), Marcello is only too anxious to escape the arms of the Madre, but on his exit he sees Maddalena sleeping in a small cell and enters in order to declare his love for her, only to be discovered by the Madre, who immediately swears revenge on him and Maddalena. Now it is the Madre’s turn to demand to know how Marcello was able to enter the convent and, because of the sacred oath he made earlier, he is unable to speak and clear Maddalena’s name of suspicion. ““I have *you* in my power, and *her*,”” she exults: ““I will cite you before the Holy Inquisition, that terrible Tribunal! I will myself appear against you, and tax you with sacrilegiously entering the convent, with intent to carry off one of its inhabitants....I will behold your tortures—I will enjoy them—for, well I know, you dare not violate your sacred oath” (112).

Again, this could be read as a conventional gothic trope, but within the context of anti-

Catholic rhetoric, the ideology here suggests that the confessional and the oaths of secrecy that are so much a part of this Church's practices are the actual targets of condemnation. Trying to navigate within an oral culture in which oaths and swearing on one's word are privileged cause the reader to see these oaths and this practice of orality as antiquated and even of a life-threatening nature for the young "Protestant"-coded hero Marcello. Suddenly now it is Maddalena who is on trial for lechery, seduction, and scheming to introduce a lover into the convent, while the Madre is her accuser. Such a system of hypocrisy, Ireland suggests, is a microcosmic analogy for how the Catholic Church operates within any society that it dominates, while the bifurcation of the victimized nun Maddalena and the licentious abbess Vittoria set in ironic opposition to each other also form something like a virgin/whore composite figure for the Protestant imagery.

Although Marcello attempts to reason with the Madre in a pleading letter, he fails to appeal to anything human in her: "I know, that your outward habit alone proclaims your Religion's votary. Your mind retains a partiality for the voluptuous scenes of this world, and is not wedded to its Maker.—To your innate sense of Religion, therefore, I appeal not; but to that unerring monitor, your conscience" (129). In other words, Marcello attempts to reason with the Madre as if she were a Reformation Protestant, not an antiquated and hypocritical practitioner of a religion that is all externals, all show, all false exteriors concealing evil within. In the tale of Marcello's seduction and then persecution by the Madre we can read an allegory of the Reformation writ in fictional terms. The Madre, because of her immersion in a corrupt Church that has fostered and encouraged this deceit, has no conscience, no internal monitor that would allow her to curb her appetites and behave in a reasonable and decent manner. The Protestant privileging of the individual conscience over the institutional domination of a priestly hierarchy

and an oppressive confessional are attacked in *The Abbess*.

In addition to condemning the clergy, *The Abbess* includes an obligatory Inquisition scene, this one spanning a good deal of the text and containing a fair amount of condemnation for the institution as the vilest ever designed. When Maddalena's father attempts to locate here with the prison's walls, he encounters

the dark abode of one of the familiars. Here, the Duca was left in company with two men, whose sullen appearance coincided with this gloomy residence. 'And can these be officers of Heaven's justice?' thought the Duca; 'these wretches, whose murderous looks inspire the beholder with horror and aversion? Is this the seat of pure Religion? Does she sanction the methods here practiced? Methods so contrary to all feelings of humanity, that the soul that even *thinks* of them recoils? Is the dungeon, the torture, and the flame, to convince the poor, the deluded victim?—No; it only serves to harden him in his perverse belief; for, if, through the agonies which the rack inflicts, he perforce confesses and abjures his error, religion obtains no victory, reason no convert, and truth no follower. For he still secretly cherishes his false doctrine, and becomes only a hypocritical professor, through such violent measures, which, as they are manifestly repugnant to our reason, nature, and feelings, cannot be of divine institution. (174)

Again, the subjectivity being appealed to here is that of an Enlightenment-era Protestant, not a typical Renaissance nobleman living in Italy during the height of Roman Catholic power, and the reader is being invited, like the Duca, to marvel at the corruption, the primitive force, and ignorant violence of an antiquated and oppressive religious institution. "Shrieks," "groans," (175) torture instruments like "ropes, large pullies, cords that were clotted with blood" abound (241), while the horrors are personalized when Marcello is held in a cell and is able to read on the walls the poignant tale of a young woman arrested for heresy with her mother and lover and burned at the stake in 1590 (181-83). The last volume of the novel centers on the extended trial of Marcello and Maddalena before the horrifying powers of the Inquisition. Speech after speech is made about the tribunal's operation, all of them designed to conjure outrage in the British reading public. How could any other reaction be supposed to passages like this: "'Swear,' cried

the Grand Inquisitor, in a solemn tone, ‘that you will answer truly every interrogatory, and never reveal any of the mysteries practiced in this tribunal.’... ‘We are deputed, returned the Inquisitor, ‘to extirpate heresy, and punish with rigour every offence against the Holy Catholic Faith; but we are lenient to those who willingly confess their errors, who show unfeigned signs of contrition, and throw themselves upon our mercy’” (197).

Why does the Inquisition emerge with such prominence in so many gothic texts written during the Enlightenment? Although the Inquisition was abolished in France during the revolutionary period, it continued to flourish in Portugal, Rome, and Spain, and, as such, was imaginatively perceived as an imminent threat on the very borders of England, able to enter into the practice of any country that was not vigilant in keeping out all vestiges of sympathy to the Catholic Church. Much of the action of the last two volumes of *The Abbess* concerns the attempt of the Inquisition to absolve Marcello of his need to keep his oath to the Madre and to reveal the truth about his visit to the convent. He refuses, stating “‘I must, in honour, conceal the secret; for, in my opinion, no power whatsoever can absolve me from my oath....I am of the Catholic persuasion. I have ever adhered to its doctrines, and will die stedfast in the true belief. Yet, my conscience revolts at this breach of faith. I am prepared for the tortures; they shall not draw the secret from me’” (199). Again, what is most interesting about this set-piece, the hero’s bravado in the face of death, is the recourse to the individualized Protestant conscience as the highest religious and spiritual value, above the dictates of any group of human clergy. As three separate and interlocked subplots and a “Romance Ballad of the Black Plumed Knight and Monzaga the Maid of Lily-Hue” play out, the tale of Marcello and Maddalena works, as we knew it would, toward a happy ending, with the exposure and punishment of the Madre and Ubaldo.

The Abbess was such strong medicine that it lingered in the consciousness of the British

reading public, influencing the depiction of abbesses and monks in the dozens of gothic novels and chapbooks that followed its publication (notably George Walker's *The Three Spaniards* [1800], George Moore's *Theodosius de Zulvin, the Monk of Madrid* [1802], Mary Ann Radcliffe's *Manfroné, or the One Handed Monk* [1809], Sarah Green's *The Carthusian Friar: or, The Mysteries of Montanville* [1814], William Child Green's *Abbot of Montserrat* [1826], and dozens of others). But why has the text been virtually lost and critically ignored when dozens of other works from the period have continued to spawn discussion and interest? The answer lies perhaps in its very clear propagandistic content. Literary critics are not comfortable recognizing that literature always and already is written to serve an ideological purpose and so they are drawn to celebrating works for their formalistic or aesthetic qualities, which then give these texts a "universal" or "transcendent" meaning that extends beyond their particular historical moment. The gothic ideology is deeply implicated in the debate over the passage of the Catholic Emancipation bill as well as the vagaries of the modernization and secularization process and, as such, it is a species of propaganda, sometimes engrossing, sometimes intriguing, but always serving a very clear and historically specific purpose.

Ireland's *Gondez the Monk* (1807) ostensibly concerns the adventures of an Italian nobleman named Hubert Avinzo who does not know the identity of his parents or why he is being raised by the Scottish Lord Sir Alan and the Lady Macdonald during the time of Edward I's defeat by Robert the Bruce. Hubert's travels, his skirmishes with English jailors and evil monks, culminate eventually in the predictable happy ending of a class-appropriate marriage to Ronilda "of the race of Finlagan" (347) and his "Taranto" property restored (326), but before that can occur, Hubert has to confront, unmask, and see punished the evil genius of his destiny: Gondez the monk, the hypocritical embodiment of secretive maneuvering behind the scenes, an

ambitious Italian bastard, the son of a licentious Cardinal and his nun-mistress. Gondez is actually Giovanni Maldichini, now living off the coast of Scotland disguised as a monk who at one point schemes to betray Robert the Bruce into the hands of Edward for a large bounty. Given the English loyalties of his readership, Ireland's ideological agenda is curious: he seeks to have his audience sympathize with the Scottish in their bid to maintain their independence from England, consistently depicting the English as duplicitous and in league with a corrupt clergy. Certainly Ireland's own political sympathies were liberal and between 1814 and 1823 he lived in France because he had been appointed by Napoleon Bonaparte as librarian for the Bibliothèque Nationale. His political agenda was actually motivated, however, not just by sympathy for the French revolution, but by the 1797 attempt by Scottish radicals to throw the English out of Scotland with the help of the French. Although this attempted revolution failed, Ireland wanted his readers to understand the historical context of recent Scottish history in order to sympathize with the Scottish radical leader Thomas Muir, who had begged the French to invade England (Kahan ed. of *Gondez*, 15-16).

For all the long-winded detail and constant shifts in plot and character, the historical aspects of the novel are much less compelling than the use that Ireland makes of the anti-Catholic subtext: the mad monk who plots political intrigue, rape, and murder, and the solemn session of the Inquisition that is interrupted by the screaming "Little Red Woman," a damned witch who has come to demand that Gondez be sent with her to hell. According to Tompkins, this scene is "no better illustration of the way in which the lurid and vehement spirit of the German *Schauerroman* broke into the Gothic Romance" (246), but it is actually more accurate to read the appearance of this mad witch at the Inquisition as one of the more violent and irrational moments in the anti-Catholic repertoire.

Ireland very early cues his reader into his anti-Catholic agenda, and the reader of these gothics would have recognized the rhetorical devices and the verbal nudges very easily. Abbot Gondez himself is described in terms that recall Lewis's Ambrosio:

His features were strikingly prominent, and marked with every line that portrays internal craft, malice, cruelty and revenge. His small piercing eyes emitting a look of malign enquiry...his nose, though short, was peculiarly aquiline, and gave to his general appearance an air of ferocity, which was in a great measure heightened by the cadaverous complexion of his countenance and the falling in of his cheeks, added to which, his mouth was hideously wide, round the falling extremities of which forever seemed to play the smile of mingled deceit and ineffable contempt. (88)

With dyed red hair to match his "red complexion," Gondez "harrows up the soul of the observer, and presents to the contemplative mind some dreadful picture, replete with sin and horror" (88). His monastery is a "haunt of terror and of blood" (124), filled with monks who are "schooled in horror and deceit" (131). Gondez's red hair and face, however, signify his allegiance to the strange "Little Red Woman" who dramatically appears as he is taken before the Inquisition. Addressing him as a kindred spirit, she demands that he join her in hell: "Dost thou not remember me Gondez? Dost thou not recall to mind the cloisters of Columba's monastery, and that eventful night which gave thee to captivity?—Again, Gondez, I revisit thee, for thou, with me, shalt share the consuming torments of the damned" (314). This "ghastly phantom" later identifies herself as "the suffering spirit of Oronza's Witch, and in the realms of Erebus, recall to mind [that I was] the yearly visitant of the cloisters of Saint Columba!" (314).

Thus, when the Scottish troops first enter the "magnificent chapel of Saint Columba's convent" where Gondez presides, they are struck by the "pomp and ceremony . . . [used] to enchain the mind as well as to rivet the eye of the admiring and awe-struck gazer" (87). The "elevated chair on a magnificent altar resembled more a gaudy throne, than a monkish seat," and Gondez sits there with "two lively boys in scarlet robes, waving to and fro large massive silver

censors that diffused the most odoriferous perfumes” (87). In this brief passage we are given a number of stock anti-Catholic tropes, not the least of which is the decadence, effeminacy, and extravagance of the Church that were particularly condemned by the Protestant imaginary. But as this is a gothic chapel, there is a “subterranean abode” (236) and a “secret cavern” (237) that need to be explored, but only Gondez holds the “master key” (240) because both places store the “wealth of the avaricious Gondez,” gained from “Italian vessels” and his own pirating activities as a marauding robber (243). The trope being played on here is the invasion and secret wealth from Italy (codeword for “Rome”) that is infecting and attempting to manipulate honest and virtuous British politics. In addition to ill-gotten goods, the secret tunnels beneath the monastery also hold the beautiful “Ronilda the Fair,” who relates how she found herself kidnapped by the pirate-monk Gondez and taken to his gloomy monastery off the bay of Oronza’s Island. Here she was informed by Gondez that he also held her brother Donald as prisoner and that, unless she consented to “be the mistress of his unbridled pleasures and abhorred licentiousness,” he would kill her brother. Months pass while the “monkish hypocrite” brings her food in her secret cavern until finally his patience breaks and he imprisons her “in total darkness” (290-91). It is at this point that the Little Red Woman appears and demands the soul of Gondez, with whom she seems to have made an infernal pact. The passage is one of the most over-the-top scenes in gothic fiction, and comes close to rivaling anything in *The Monk*:

I started back, for a form, hideous to the sight, appeared;—it was a little haggard woman, clothed in red garments; and in her rear, a demon, of tremendous size, with scorpion lashes, seemed glorying in the agonies which he inflicted on the miserable sufferer. On beholding me, the fiend belching forth flames, withheld his lacerating whip, while the beldam thus prognosticated in my ear:—‘Behold in me the tortured spirit of the Little Red Woman;...fate hath so ordained that I am to howl into thine ears the eternal tortures that await thee, thou bloody brother in iniquity! Hear me, therefore, thou damned monk!—The scene of thy crimes is closed!’ (340)

The novel inexorably leads to the more extraordinary tale of Gondez's real identity which only emerges after he is tortured on the rack for three days. We finally learn that the late Cardinal Nicolo Gonzari and his mistress, Madre Aluzoo, "Abbess of the Convent Della Pieta, at Rome," are his parents. Born into a convent "wherein every disgraceful scene was practiced by the vicious Cardinal," we are told even more than we want to know about Nicolo: "not contented with his incontinence with the Madre Aluzzo, [he] had also recourse to measures which tended to vitiate the minds of those nuns on whom he fixed his guilty eyes, and with whom he frequently followed the most abandoned courses" (330). An ecclesiastical libertine, Nicolo raises his bastard son as his true heir in debauchery and greed as both of them scheme to possess the wealth of the Gonzari family as well as the beautiful Rosanna, pregnant wife of the Duca Gonzari. When the son realizes that he is in competition with his father, he kills his father with the help of his mother and, now a "votary of that horrid tribunal" the Inquisition, manages to have the Duca arrested on trumped-up charges of heresy (332). In these few pages in which the mysteries of the previous three volumes are explained, Ireland distills his anti-Catholic agenda in a few key strokes or "type scenes." The evil mother of Gondez is presented as of "menial extraction" (330), yet of strong enough character to aid her son in killing his father "by a slow poison" (332), and it is she who is ultimately blamed for Gondez's fate: she was "his abominable mother, to whose early practices he was indebted for that chain of crimes which stamped him more a fiend of darkness than the divine representative of his Almighty Maker" (333). As all the facts of his crimes emerge, Gondez is sentenced to be burnt "by a slow fire" (341) within the walls of the Inquisition, so as not to expose one of their own to the shame of a public death.

So what are we to make of Ireland's agenda as a gothic novelist? Was he motivated by a desire to redeem his sullied reputation as a man of letters or was he merely a canny marketer who

knew novels dealing in such material would sell well? I suspect he was driven by both agendas, but finally he would appear to me to be a man with a clear ideological mission. In his portrait of the Madre Vittoria, I am reminded of Frances Dolan's observation about the depiction of nuns in the seventeenth-century: "gender inversion or disorder and anti-Catholicism were renewable resources for discrediting one's opposition and mobilizing sentiment. When the goal is whipping up fear and loathing, overt topicality is not necessary—and may not be as effective as displacement. A whipping girl for both women and Catholics, the nun offered both titillation and a safer target than the Stuart monarchs" (531). Seeking to "whip up fear and loathing" toward someone beside himself seems to have been Ireland's ultimate intent.

III. THE CASE OF THOMAS ISAAC HORSLEY CURTIES

In the case of Curties we have an author about whom we know much more than many of the other anti-Catholic gothic authors, for instance, the mysteriously interchangeable author who published under the name "Edward Mortimer/Edward Montague." Certainly it is revealing that Curties was a member of the High Anglican establishment as Townshend has discovered. In his *The Monk of Udolpho* (1807) we have the curious example of a text that was written on assignment from the publisher John Hughes, who, as Curties tells us himself in his Preface to the novel, had for the past two years advertised a book by this title but whose originally commissioned author died before delivering the final product. When Curties accepted the task of writing the projected work, he was assured by Hughes that he "was at liberty to disclaim thus publicly any share in the title page" (I: vii), and he promptly did so by asserting that it should more appropriately be called "Filial Piety," a nod toward his portrait of the aggrieved heroine's

struggle to defend her father's name and reputation after he gambles away her inheritance and the kingdom. But for all his disavowals, there is no denying the fact that the energy of the text belongs to the Monk of Udolpho, not the heroine Hersilia or her dead father. They are the mere background props to yet another representation of the evil inherent in the monk on a rampage.

The novel initially presents itself as an aristocratic gothic romance between the heroine Princess Hersilia, daughter of the recently murdered Duke of Placenza, and her beloved Lorenzo Val-Ambrosio, son and heir to the Prince of Guestella, and it employs the usual devices of that genre: a false will, an evil guardian, a forced separation caused by slanderous charges against the heroine, two false suitors, travel through a sublime Apennines mountainous landscape to a haunted and ruined Castello, and a happy resolution only after false identities are revealed and the villain is exposed and punished. But like Radcliffe's *The Italian* and Lewis's *Monk*, the energy behind the evil deeds, the source of the mystery, can be located in one man: a monk who has the uncanny ability to be everywhere at once, or who functions as the puppet-master, pulling the strings on all the characters and all the action in the novel. This man, of course, is the knight-robber and false Inquisitor Sanguedoni who is also known as the Monk of Udolpho, the name itself a sort of salute to the genre's totemic figures, Radcliffe and Lewis, but at the same time a self-conscious nod to the genre's conventions and its blatant propagandizing agenda.

Like other bourgeois novels of the period, *The Monk of Udolpho* begins not simply with all its anti-Catholic tropes in place, but with the other conventions of a distinctly middle-class agenda and this can be seen in the vehemence in which the narrative voice attacks the aristocratic vice of gambling: "Accursed infatuation!," says the dying Duke of Placenza, "thou spirit of gambling, detested when too late, insidious fiend of ruin, stolen from Hell for man's temptation and undoing, it is thou who has overthrown me. I impiously bartered away for a disgraceful,

shameful chance, depending on the hazard of a die, all that once was mine, and pledged my birthright and my Hersilia's future inheritance to a gamester" (I: 6). Having lost his kingdom and gambled away his wife's legacy to their daughter, the Duke takes a weak potion to attempt to poison himself, but repenting his rashness at the last minute, begs for an antidote from Father Udolpho, his confessor, just after this confession to Hersilia. Seeing a chance to gain control over the soon-to-be orphaned beauty, Udolpho, famed for his "knowledge and skill in pharmacy" (I: 21), mixes instead a much more potent poison which he administers to the Duke in order to successfully complete the "suicide." Emerging from the Duke's chamber, the monk now has possession of the Duke's new will making Udolpho the guardian of Hersilia. As we might suspect, his intentions towards her are quickly revealed to be both sexual and political.

The reader is certainly not kept in suspense long about Udolpho's true character. We are told that he was "tall, and even gigantic, inclined rather to the robust than meagre! He wore a full hood, which was generally drawn over his whole face and fastened under the chin, so that the real expression of his saturnine features could never be distinguished" (I: 23). But perhaps the most macabre accoutrement is the white linen cloth he wears wrapped across his forehead, "upon which was displayed in the centre the ghastly grinning ensign of a Death's head, said to be the emblem of an order of monks founded by Udolpho" (I: 23). This is the first clue we have that Udolpho has another life, somewhere else, although certainly rumors had circulated for years about this other monastery: "Some said he was a mere adventurer, ambitious of an extraordinary estimation. That this self-denial was artificial and only external, and that under the mask of pretended sanctity he was the secret hidden plotter and perpetrator of many dreadful transactions, and of crimes of even a horrible nature" (I: 22-23). If on a conscious level Hersilia thinks that Udolpho is a holy man and therefore that she should trust him, on an unconscious level she, like

the protagonists in the novels of Lewis and Radcliffe, knows very well that he killed her father, and this is revealed to her in a premonitory dream she has as her father lies in his final death throes (I: 29-33). Threatening to reveal publicly that the Duke has committed suicide and that he therefore does not deserve Christian burial in hallowed ground, Udolpho quickly gains mastery over Hersilia, and this lie, coupled with the Church's power to control burial rituals, represents just another face in the Protestant campaign against priestcraft. As Lorenzo exclaims when he learns the terms of the Duke's new will, making the threatening, tyrannical, and "almost terrific monk" II: 146) her guardian: "Is it the forgery of an empty dream, or the too artful web of designing priestcraft laboring darkly and malignantly to destroy the happiness and peace of the most perfect of all God's creatures" (I: 122).

One of the most revealing aspects of how this sort of anti-Catholic gothic textuality reproduced itself in different media, spinning off in different and clearly propagandistic directions, can be seen in the fact that Francis William Blagdon's *Flowers of Literature for 1806* reprinted verbatim the eight-page discussion between Lorenzo and Udolpho on the Catholic doctrine of compulsory clerical celibacy titled now as "The Monk and the Lover" (469-74) that occurs in Curties's novel (I: 111-119). When Lorenzo challenges Udolpho, asking if he has ever been plagued with "worldly feeling," Udolpho demurs and Lorenzo promptly announces that, if not, he must be a "perfect" man and as perfection is impossible, then he must instead go by "the appellation of an enthusiast or hypocrite" (I: 114). As Blagdon makes clear, he has chosen to publish this particular extract from Curties's fiction both for its stylistic merits and for its presentation of sound Protestant doctrine.⁹

We also know because we have read many gothic novels that unsavory complications are in store for Hersilia before she can be reunited with Lorenzo, and we know, like her, that

Udolpho will be the instigator and nemesis she will have to battle before she is restored to her inheritance. Beloved by the ignorant masses for his supposed sanctity and holiness, Udolpho is nothing if not a “deep designing, finished hypocrite...a criminal” (I: 156), “a proud, pampered priest” (I: 175), and a practitioner of “shallow priestcraft” (I: 176). Curties spares no accusation and his rhetoric of denunciations against Udolpho continue throughout this four volume novel in an unrelenting almost hysterical manner (words like “savage,” “ruthless,” “ravenous,” “fiend,” “devilish,” and “fraud” are used in one paragraph alone to describe Udolpho [II: 22]). But Udolpho also goes by the name Sanguedoni, and in this identity he is the nephew of the Duke Cosmo of Parma, a man who is intent on pressing his suit of marriage to Hersilia with Cosmo’s assistance. In this disguise he dresses in a black knight’s uniform and participates in jousts for his lady’s honor (II: 128). In this disguise he also carries a dagger, threatens rape (II: 139), and generally represents the aristocratic libertine on a rampage. But the reader knows that this man is also a monk, and so in this merging of the two figures in one monstrous masculine nightmare, the bourgeois Briton is asked to condemn all the excesses of an antiquated and corrupt European culture, its philosophical poses, its political feudalistic system, and its traditional religion.

The final major character is introduced in the Lady Hortensia Delli Correnti, a woman who functions as the gothic anti-heroine, blatantly libidinous, a libertine, and the cast-off mistress of Sanguedoni. Hortensia has now fallen in love with Lorenzo, who is indifferent to her, but in a convoluted overlapping triangle, she vows to kill him should he attempt to marry Hersilia. Taken to Udolpho’s headquarters, the Castello di Ubaldi in the mountains, Hersilia will be haunted by the ghost of the seduced nun Eloisa, spied on by the evil Spoletto, warned of danger by the mysteriously androgynous minstrel Astolpho, only to finally find herself in an underground cavern where a secret tribunal conducts trials and pronounces death sentences. This

scene is almost a parody of so many gothic novels, Germanically-inflected, in which an Inquisition scene occurs to produce shock and awe, terror and trembling in the reader:

Beneath innumerable circular arched recesses she was able to distinguish several benches surmounted by human skulls and other emblems of death....The canopy itself was formed in the shape of a coffin, and a human skeleton, meant to personify Death with pertinacious exactitude was seen as if half starting from its interior, for one of its marrowless arms was extended to throw back the lid, thus in horrible effigy grinning a harrowing stare of exulting triumph ready to gorge upon his passing victim. (III: 104)

Startled and surprised by this scene, Hersilia asks what it means and is informed that the circle is the seat of “secret council,” where the “Order of the Death’s Head” has its meetings presided over by the “Superior” of the order, Father Udolpho (III: 105). So proud is she of the secret order, that the servant Beatrice expiates: “’Tis thought that the holy Inquisition was once held here; and for that matter so it may still, for the Fathers often meet here to midnight council, and vanish away nobody knows how or when” (III: 106). But the “monks” are just robbers (“a band of resolute and bravos,” III: 193) and the conflation of “monks and robbers” makes the anti-Catholic ideology clear, even if veiled in a certain amount of fictional mystification. When Udolpho threatens Hersilia with a trial before the Inquisition over which he presides, he is certain that his confederates will participate with him “in a bond of bloody faith, to assist the demoniac projects of each other, and the fellowship of guilt was indeed in them a horrible union” (III: 199).

When we are finally given the full history of Sanguedoni he conforms to the portrait of an aristocratic libertine, a younger son forced for his own protection into the Church because of his crimes of murder and gambling, and we learn that in the guise of Sanguedoni he was the gambler who had destroyed the life of Hersilia’s father (III: 205), as well as the Duke’s confessor who killed him and forged a new will: “In his heart [Udolpho/Sanguedoni] scoffed at an institution which had been to him only a scourge, and looked upon it as a precious fraud founded only by priestcraft and aristocratic policy, for the purpose of awing and enslaving mankind into

submission and blind obedience” (III: 188-89). In fact, we are told that Udolpho is an atheist, “his only god was self” (III: 190). After yet another volume of complications in which Hortensia attempts to marry and seduce Lorenzo in the disguise of Hersilia, Hortensia finally sends the eyewitness report of Sanguedoni’s crimes to the Inquisition and the forces of the actual inquisition do indeed descend on his Castello (IV: 138). Just as he thinks he is about to preside over the trial of his rival Lorenzo Guestella, charged with heresy for mocking Udolpho (in that initial debate about the impossibility of clerical celibacy), he instead finds himself as the accused. Sanguedoni/Udolpho as both robber and monk is, as so frequently occurs in the gothic, hoist on his own petard. Udolpho’s last vile act is to kill Astolpho, who is actually the seduced nun Eloisa in disguise and who also turns out to be Hersilia’s illegitimate half-sister. As Udolpho kills himself, defiant and scornful to the end, he declares: “behold how in death my spirit derides your judgments, scorns your laws, and triumphs over your defeated vengeance” (IV: 200). This is a novel long and sprawling enough to also contain another full convent tale based on the unhappy history of Eloisa and her disgraced mother, both immured in a convent where they unluckily meet Udolpho and their ultimate doom (IV: 207-32). A rapist, murderer, gambler, forger, swindler, robber, Udolpho is a monstrous Catholic monk, a quite literal shape-shifter and therefore all the more terrifying for the British Protestant imaginary to contemplate.

IV: CONCLUSION

By examining the ideological moves made in these three gothic novels, I hope to have suggested that the many and convoluted origins of the gothic genre need to be placed in a wider historical, textual, religious, and social context; further, that what we recognize as a largely fictional form (novels, novellas, short stories) actually arose out of a more complex inactive network of overlapping discourse systems that had been current in Europe for close to three hundred years.¹⁰ The gothic genre can most accurately be understood as a hybridized form, a discursive site that absorbed the tenets of libertine literature, propagandistic prose works, anti-Catholic polemics, and pornographic tales and dialogues featuring nuns and priests,¹¹ as well as lower-class reading materials that promulgated fears about the encroaching power of the Pope, Catholic clergy, and the spectre of the Inquisition.¹² These various textualities were by necessity unstable, diffuse, continually adjusting their parameters as they intersected with the realities of social and historical practice. When one focuses on Gothicism as an ideology one by necessity has to also recognize the gap between historical reality and its distorted representations in the fictions, as well as how political conflicts are sublimated, how distinctions are made between mental and material productions, and how the phenomenon of projection occurs in the creation of characters and type-scenes.¹³

From the late eighteenth century through the final passage of the Catholic Emancipation Bill in 1829, Britons were looking for a scapegoat and, voila, one came ready-made and uncannily familiar in the figure of the ghostly and persistent Catholic. We can see manifestations of this anxiety writ large in the hundreds of gothic chapbooks and novels that seized the imaginations of the lower and middle-class Briton, while the longer and more expensive three- and four-volume novels written by Radcliffe, Lewis, Maturin, Ireland, Montague/Mortimer, and Horsley peddled very much the same representations and scenarios for

a more well-heeled reading population. In fact, it would appear that the Whig ascendancy as represented by Horace Walpole and Matthew Lewis self-consciously employed the gothic in its campaign to demonize and scapegoat Catholics in the public consciousness. Relying on by now stereotyped tropes that had circulated for more than two hundred years in anti-Catholic propaganda and pornography—like the tyrannical and hypocritical Inquisitor, the lecherous monk or the lesbian nun—anti-Catholic gothics enlisted the familiar conventions from a variety of discourse systems intended for the lower- and middling classes.¹⁴ As Robert Darnton has observed, while the sophisticated and ironic classic of anti-clerical pornography *Thérèse Philosophe* (1748) may have been read primarily by the elite “champagne-and-oyster” crowd,¹⁵ its source materials were distilled into cheap, wordless chapbooks that circulated to the lowest level of readership, the poor and illiterate, in order to spread the same tale of clerical seduction (107). Relying on the fact that all levels of reading audiences would have long been familiar with the staples of the anti-Catholic agenda, the gothic novelist could use them almost as aesthetic shorthand for conveying in a few dramatic strokes all that threatened the beleaguered British Protestant nation.

NOTES

¹ By September 1792 there were 1,500 French émigré priests in England, and that number would increase to close to 5,000 within a year. The sudden appearance of so many French Catholic priests in a country that had virtually outlawed their presence two hundred years earlier could not have been particularly easy to accept, and certainly reports in John Bell and Peter Stuart’s *Oracle*

for September 1792 suggest “a very definite fear of ‘contamination’” from the French émigrés (Purves 32).

² I very much admire the organizational schemes in a number of scholarly studies of the anti-Catholic theme in literature, particularly Dolan’s focus on representations of Catholics and Catholicism as personified in disorderly women and specific historical crises: the Gunpowder Plot, the advocacy of Catholicism by Queen Henrietta Maria, the Popish Plot, and Titus Oates and the Meal Tub Plot (1999: 4-5). Griffin, Peschier, and Franchot use thematic organizations, and Paz and Wallis present historical overviews.

³ My position on the gothic’s ambivalent use of anti-Catholic tropes in *Gothic Riffs* (2010) is similar to those put forward earlier in works by Geary, Sage, Lévy, and Bostrom in particular. For instance, Lévy has stated that “While the Gothic novel in a way voiced a secular tradition of antipopery feelings, it coincided with the rise in France of a new kind of openly anticlerical literature, which only the fall of the *ancien régime* could have fostered....Of the many reasons that account for the popularity of Gothic fiction in Revolutionary France, the new identity of views regarding Roman Catholicism is probably the most important” (153). But blatant anti-Catholic propagandizing has always been countered by what Lévy refers to as “the ambiguous attitude and divided feelings of the mid-century [British architectural] revivalists, who, at the same time that they celebrated the melancholy beauty of some ‘hallowed fane’ or the picturesque effects of ‘yon ruin’d abbey’s moss-grown piles,’ rejoiced at the decline and fall of the ‘Romish’ empire over their country” (152). While Lévy is accurate in depicting the gothic’s ambivalence toward Catholicism, another early critic of the gothic, Devendra Varma, is, I think, mistaken in downplaying the condemnation of Catholicism as a system of belief:

In the eighteenth century the Roman Catholic Church made its last great attempt at universal domination. Religion had earlier allied itself with political despotism: in France under Louis XIV, and in England under the later Stuarts....Although Catholicism alone is never used by Gothic novelists as a means of evoking terror, and although there are no direct theological attacks, the implication is always that religion when abused becomes a horrible and ghastly perversion. Thus it is the incidental vestments, not the doctrine of Catholicism, that serve as a source of terror. There is a charm about the sweet seclusion of a Catholic monastery and pious convent life, but the tortures and atrocities behind its walls make the heroines resolute in rejecting the veil....The monastic garb often envelops the heart of an assassin; the walls of a cloister enclose the sullen misery of its votaries. (*Gothic Flame*: 219)

⁴ Current critical discussion of the gothic has tended to be split between those who read it as an ideology with specific thematic content and concerns (Miles), and those who read it as an aesthetic (Gamer). My focus on reading the gothic through genre mutations and thematic ideology is a way of bridging these two positions, which are not, I think, mutually exclusive.

⁵ This claim is hardly original. Tompkins stated in her 1921 dissertation that “the prejudice against Catholicism, or, more particularly, priests and monks, the ‘anti-Roman bray’ . . . is heard at its loudest in both the English and the German novels of terror” (1980: 104), while Fiedler sees the gothics as “the most blatantly anti-Catholic of all, projecting in its fables a consistent image of the Church as the Enemy” (137). Tarr notes that when Catholic themes are treated “intellectually, when there is [a] question of Catholic dogma . . . [then] works of Gothic fiction begin to slip into the category of the novel of propaganda” (121). McWhir comes closest to my position by arguing that “some Gothic novels are almost anti-Catholic propaganda” (36). I would correct this to say that it is more than “some”; it seems more accurate to say that it is many but certainly not all (Tarr notes that of the 121 gothic novels she studied, 107 contained Catholic tropes [121]).

⁶ Alter traces the concept of the “type scene” from Homeric scholarship through its use in Biblical narrative. Briefly, the type scene describes “certain fixed situations that the poet is

expected to include in his narrative and that he must perform according to a set order of motifs—like the arrival, the message, the voyage, the assembly,” etc. (59). The gothic ideology employs a variety of anti-Catholic type scenes, such as the interpolated nun’s or monk’s tale, the Inquisition torture and trial scene, the exploration of the ruined chapel and the discovery of a corpse or buried manuscript in a tomb, etc. All of these scenes became understood aesthetic conventions within the narrative, broad winks to the gothic’s readership that an anti-Catholic ideology was being advanced.

⁷ Benjamin Fisher’s Introduction to the Arno Press edition of the novel mentions the clear anti-Catholic agenda of the novel, noting: “Ireland never missed a chance to play on the anti-Catholic emotions of his readers” (1974; xxiii), and “*The Abbess* typifies the uncomprehending attitude of British Protestantism toward the Roman Catholic countries of Southern Europe” (1974; xxii). George Haggerty predictably focuses on the same-sex desire of women within the convent: “the novel makes it clear that desire is always compromised, always excessive, and devotion by its nature is excessive and disgusting” (77). For Haggerty, the Catholicism in *The Abbess* is associated with the history of transgressive sexuality, and I would agree as far as stating that the novel relies on a number of tropes from well-known works of pornography and libertine literature. But depicting anti-Catholicism in gothic literature is not about trying to stir up space for sympathetic portrayals of same-sex desire or relationships; in my opinion, it is precisely the opposite.

⁸ See Haynes for a full and revisionist discussion of the persistence of anti-Catholic portraits of Jesuits, monks and nuns, and places of pilgrimage in Grand Tour literature intended for the elite reader.

⁹ I am grateful to Dale Townshend for locating this remediation of Curties's work. For a more detailed analysis of *Flowers of Literature* and its agenda, see Belanger et al.

¹⁰ Robert Druce has identified a sub-genre of gothic that he labels "Monkish Gothic to foment anti-Catholicism" (235) in order to analyze *The Autobiography of a Flea* (1887?) as "porno-gothic" (242).

¹¹ Peakman (126-27) usefully distinguishes between four sub-sets of anti-Catholic erotica in the period, all of which to some extent appeared in transmuted form in gothic texts: (1) polemics, which focused on conniving priests and the seductions of Protestant women (Russell's *The Jesuit in England* is a classic of this type); (2) English reports of French priests's trials (the Girard-Cadière scandal is an example of this type); (3) the "nunnery tale" (Edward Montague's *Legends of a Nunnery* is a classic of this sort); and (4) French pornographic prose translated into English (echoes of *Venus in the Cloister* can be detected in the libertine justifications for her sexual acts spoken by the Madre Vittoria in Ireland's *Abbess*).

¹² As Burke has noted, ballads and pamphlets remained an important form of political media throughout eighteenth-century England, with a sermon by the controversial Tory divine Henry Sacheverell selling 40,000 copies in a few days (359). Of his two most famous sermons, one was delivered on Guy Fawkes Day and attacked the continued threat to England from Catholics and non-conformists (Presbyterians and Dissenters). His second sermon, attacking Whig complacency toward the threat posed to the nation by these religious groups, led to a three year suspension from the pulpit.

¹³ Townshend has observed that the "largely obscure and forgotten texts" of the gothic, the chapbooks and "second-rate romances" offer slim pickings for the gothic scholar: "the spoils of Gothic grave-robbing are often meagre" (1). I disagree. In exhuming these texts and placing

them in a wider historical and political context in my forthcoming book (2014), I claim that they actively engaged with their culture's pressing religious and social concerns.

¹⁴ Huxley notes that the gulf between official Catholic teaching and practice by individual ecclesiastics was "enormous" during the early modern period: "it is difficult to find any medieval or Renaissance writer who does not take it for granted that, from highest prelate to humblest friar, the majority of clergymen are thoroughly disreputable. Ecclesiastical corruption begot the Reformation, and in its turn the Reformation produced the Counter Reformation" (6). For a survey of dozens of historical incidents involving eighteenth-century Spanish priests who had affairs and illegitimate children with their female confessors, see Haliczer. Several of these affairs, in which both participants were denounced to the Inquisition and forced to stand trial, read as the historical source material for any number of gothic novels by Ireland and Montague.

¹⁵ Karl Toepfer makes the same sort of distinction in his study of *ancien régime* Enlightenment theater, contrasting the open and democratic aspect of carnivalesque excess and the secret, closed, and exclusive quality of libertine orgies practiced by the aristocracy (10-13). Tuite usefully distinguishes between French anti-clerical attacks on Catholicism as the official state religion and British anti-clericalism, which "attacks a religion officially repudiated and vilified by the Protestant confessional state" (20).

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