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Demonizing the Catholic Other: Religion and the Secularization Process in Gothic Literature

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There has been a good deal of controversy lately about the presence of religion and religious tropes in Anglo-Atlantic and European Gothic textuality. On one hand, critics like Mary Muriel Tarr, Irene Bostrom, 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's 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). But in fact the Gordon riots of 1780, which left close to 300 dead in London, 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. This current critical controversy, however, simply repeats a very similar one conducted some seventy years ago between Joyce Tompkins and Montague Summers. The stark differences in opinions on this issue can be resolved by recognizing that an

"either/or" explanation will not suffice, but that in fact a "both/and" method is the more accurate way of accounting for the bifurcated ideological agendas that can be found in the hundreds of Gothic texts that were published during the 1780-1829 period.

Gothic literature can best be understood, I would claim, as part of the Western secularization process or perhaps it is best 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 roughly1780 to 1850.[1] 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. Although it has long been a critical truism to claim that the Gothic is anti-Catholic and anti-clerical, I will argue that

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[1] As Robert Miles sees it, England and, I would claim, Germany and America viewed the Protestant Reformation as "unfinished business," and so the Gothic became popular because it displayed "the deformities of Catholicism[,] held them up to the reader for the purposes of Protestant delectation" (84). 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. I explore these issues in much more depth in my recent book *Gothic Riffs* (2010).

the issue of religion's uncanny presence in the period's literature is much more complex and conflicted. Yes, the "whiggish" Gothic aesthetic is anti-Catholic, but in its bid to establish a (false) pedigree for itself, it is also nostalgic, reactionary, and in thrall to the lure of an earlier feudal, aristocratic, and Catholic past. There is no question that British writers recognized the power of the Gothic to seduce its readers with ambivalent and confusing messages. An analysis of many Gothic works reveals that the Gothic needs to be understood as a powerful ideological discourse-system that kept specters and apparitions of the sacred as well as the demonic alive at the same time that it castigated the failings of a formal, institutionalized religion that it wanted to forget it ever embraced. As a major component of the secularizing process, the Gothic aesthetic anxiously looked both backward and forward at the same time, torn between reifying the past and anxiously embracing a future it could not quite envision.

There is no question that the bourgeoisie of Enlightenment Europe sought to embrace secular ideals 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. As Angela Keane has claimed, "Novels stood to Protestant, Whiggish progressivism as romance stood to regressive, Catholic feudalism. . . . [Therefore] the later part of the eighteenth century produced a new, if ambivalent fascination with the pre-modern epistemology and its cultural and political signs, not least its national signs" (24). The Gothic imaginary, however, is a distinctly hybrid genre, neither purely a novel form nor purely a romance. Able to assume different shapes and accomplish contradictory ideological work, the Gothic could be Protestant (Sage et al.) as well as Catholic

(Summers and Purves) at the same (confusing) time. It also could present a "pre-modern epistemology" at the same time it denounced such nonsense. For David Punter, "the code of gothic is thus not a simple one in which past is encoded in the present or vice versa, but dialectical, past and present intertwined, each distorting each other" (1980; 418). In a similar manner, I would argue that the process of secularization that occurs in the Gothic is not a simple forward-moving trajectory that we would recognize as the Enlightenment project, but more of an oscillation in which the transcendent and traditional religious beliefs and tropes are alternately preserved and reanimated and then blasted and condemned by the conclusion of the work. The Gothic aesthetic anxiously splits, then, between an evocation of the religious and feudal past and a glimpse of the emerging secular, between the importance of the pre-capitalist human community and the newly modern individual in the public sphere.

While early critics of the Gothic like Joyce Tompkins conclude by seeing the demonization of Catholicism as motivated by the Protestant reading public's attraction to the "lurid" (274), the devoutly Catholic Montague Summers (1880-1948) boldly pronounces in his *Gothic Quest* (1938) that the Gothic should be read as a nostalgically romantic "revival" of the supernatural beliefs of Catholicism. Writing in opposition to anti-Catholic Surrealists such as André Breton (1896-1966), who had claimed the Gothic's use of dreams and the irrational as the basis for Surrealism, Summers noted that "there is no true romanticism apart from Catholic influence and feeling" (390). It is surely no coincidence that the uncanny as defined by Freud was adapted by Breton in 1937 in his own attempt to claim the Gothic and the pleasure-principle as the origins for Surrealism. In his appropriation of the uncanny as a manifestation of the fears and

phobias of the dark unconscious, Breton has been accused of reducing the Gothic to a purely psychological category, a "primal psychomania," according to Baldick and Mighall.   For them, Breton's approach would make the Gothic personal rather than political, and it would fail to situate the genre within its fuller "whiggish" context: its need to condemn "the twin yoke of feudal politics and papal deception, from which [Protestants] had still to emancipate themselves" (219):

> Gothic novels were set in the Catholic south because, 'without great violation of truth,' Gothic (that is, 'medieval') practices were believed still to prevail there. Such representations drew upon and reinforced the cultural identity of the middle-class Protestant readership, which could thrill to the scenes of political and religious persecution safe in the knowledge that they themselves had awoken from such historical nightmares. (219; internal quotation from Walter Scott)

While I certainly think there is no question that many of the period's Gothic texts conform to this pattern, there is also a concurrent tendency to look backward to the lost traditions of the past with nostalgia, or with "the pain a sick person feels because he wishes to return to his native land, and fears never to see it again" (*OED*).

To not recognize that cultural productions contain both strands, that is, gestures toward nostalgia and reform, is to fail to appreciate how easy it is to be haunted by that which we have supposedly left behind.   Indeed, it would seem that one of history's most vital lessons is that cultures require hundreds of years to absorb radical change into their social imaginaries, and the changes that Western Europe underwent, moving from the Renaissance to the "modern" society of the 1848 revolution, were traumatic indeed.

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, reformations, 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, however, a simple

textual substitution for discredited religious beliefs, but instead "a genuine expression of

profound religious malaise" (qtd. Porte 42). But I would claim that there is a good deal

of textual substitution being enacted, and one of the primary substitutes is the corrupt

monk, the perfidious Jesuit, or the Grand Inquisitor for the devil.

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" (33). Just five years earlier 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 had had the worst of it in the media

battle between himself and his victim, who was counter-sued by Girard, placed on trial,

and acquitted herself.[2] The devil also became increasingly identified with the pope in the

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 to be

developed throughout a number of Gothic novels and chapbooks.[3] 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 non-

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[2] For the best overview of the Girard case, see Kuznicki, who 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).

[3] An extensive discussion of the pope's association with the devil during the Guy Fawkes

festivities can be found in Haydon, chapter one. 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 more pleasing form, the amorous

seductress).

event in the eighteenth century. As late as 1818 a chapbook version of the entire history,

blaming it on a Jesuit instigator, was published in Penrith, Cumbria.

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 and sexual distrust of the clergy, theological disagreements about

Transubstantiation and the power of "priestcraft," and popular fears about foreign

invasions from the Catholic countries of France and Spain (Haydon 3). 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 disguised form

in any number of Gothic novels. The devil most frequently finds Gothic embodiment as

a lurking Jesuit or Dominican (as was Ambrosio in Lewis's *The Monk*, 1796), who is

intent on stealing the inheritances of, seducing, or murdering his hapless victims. The

slow-motion narrative of Ambrosio hunting his sister Antonia through the catacombs in

order to murder her after he has raped her is one of the most horrific and disgusting in all

of Gothic fiction, and it was repeatedly illustrated in novels and chapbook versions of the

work throughout the nineteenth century and indeed into the twentieth century. One can

see illustrations of this scene in the engraved frontispiece to the 1826 edition of *The

Monk* published by John William and available at the British Library:

(http://lovecraftismissing.com/?p=6523) or in one of the six the tableaux vivants designed

by Antonin Artaud for his abridgement of the novel

(http://madamepickwickartblog.com/2010/05/in-the-clutches-of-the-nether-reaches/).

The episode of this mad monk, sexually perverse and incestuously motivated, and

then driven to violent and sadistic murder in order to conceal his crimes, became

something like an anti-catholic visual talisman, invoked in increasingly sketchy ways, telegraphed almost, as if just to recall the tale of Ambrosio the Dominican was to effectively speak volumes about the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church. As Laura Doyle has recently observed, the "tableau-figure of a dagger in the breast—which also circulates through Lewis's text in the form of the Bleeding Nun—will be conjured repeatedly in Gothic fiction, including . . . in Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*. While such scenes make graphic the bodily violation of Anglo-Atlantic sisters within modernity, they also register, faintly and unconsciously, the effaced ruin of African-Atlantic and Indian-Atlantic persons" (229). For Doyle, the Gothic repeatedly figures the trope of a heroine who faces captivity and violation, possession and desecration, because of the actions of her brother, "dramatizing the possessive drive of the Atlantic's racial republics" (215). While I do not have the space here to explore the racial or colonialist agenda of the Gothic, I will say that demonizing others on the basis of gender and race went hand in hand with objectifying others on the basis of their religious beliefs. Indeed, the drive to efface and punish any subjectivity that was other than white, male, and Protestant was part and parcel of the Gothic strategy.

The Dominicans were infamous for presiding over the Inquisition in Spain (1478-1834), and the Jesuits had been implicated in a variety of failed political assassination attempts during the religious wars in England. 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 in such chapbooks as 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*

crimes; the dreadful sufferings and tortures they underwent (1821). The focus on blood

and later vampires in the Gothic can be seen, according to Sage (51-54), as a veiled

attempt to confront some of the more eccentric aspects of the theological debates about

the Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation, while the invasion fears had three specific

sources: first, they were as current as 1715 and then 1745, with the last two attempts

made by the exiled and Catholic Stuarts to reclaim the throne. Finally, and even more

frighteningly, in August 1779 the combined Spanish and French fleets had come as close

to invading England as they 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" (Haydon 203). 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.

The Gothic also secularized the uncanny by making traditional religious beliefs

and values both familiar and strange, both minimal and powerful at the same time. As

Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (2007) observes, "there has been a titanic change in our

western civilization. We have changed not just from a condition where most people lived

'naïvely' in a construal ([that was] part Christian, part related to 'spirits' of pagan origin)

as simple reality, [but] to one in which almost no one is capable of this, but all see their

option [all beliefs, their own included] as one among many." For Taylor, this transition

occurred when the concern for and emphasis on earthly "human flourishing" replaced the

high value that had been placed on accumulating "merit" in the afterlife: "I would like to

claim that the coming of modern secularity in my sense has been coterminous with the

rise of a society in which for the first time in history a purely self-sufficient humanism came to be a widely available option. I mean by this a humanism accepting no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing. Of no previous society was this true" (18).

Although Taylor does not specifically address the Gothic, he might well have, for Europe both before and after the French Revolution was in the grip of both religious angst and political terror, and the emergence and transmutation of the Gothic mapped those fears on a broad cultural terrain. Certainly 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 Enlightenment ideologies—scientific experimentation, mechanistic philosophy, materialism, Naturalism—challenged the animistic conception of the universe that had been constructed by 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" (668). Indeed, as Thomas notes, explanatory supernatural theories were rejected throughout most of

England well before effective techniques to explain medical and natural events were developed. And it is precisely in this historical gap—between the decline of magic and the rise of science—that the Gothic imaginary emerges.

Another possible way to approach the secularization thesis would be to ask, how did the West, at least ideally, evolve the values of universal human rights, suffrage, equality between the sexes, companionate marriage, and toleration of religious and cultural differences? Jürgen Habermas has claimed that the crucial component in explaining modernization can be found in the development what he called a textual society in which readers were unified rather than divided into hierarchical social classes. The development of this broad-based literate public sphere was characterized by a print-based culture and literary texts that extolled the "whiggish"-bourgeois values of individuality, duty, loyalty, equality under the law, public education, and freedom of choice. But these social, political, and legal developments did not occur seamlessly or without a fairly contentious interaction with previous modes of largely religiously enforced patterns of behavior and thought, and this is where the vexed topic of secularization enters the discussion.

That is, in order to modernize, the newly bourgeois citizen of the secular city (the newly evolving nation-state) had to reject the archaic and superstitious beliefs of the past and embrace a brave new world of reason and "natural supernaturalism," a society in which the increasingly feminized and domesticated middle class family replaced the hierarchical family proffered earlier by the Church and King. What I am calling the earlier, feudal, aristocratic, and ecclesiastical family/clan (or way of positioning and understanding oneself in a hierarchical cultural structure) was replaced during this period

by a new political and familial structure—nationalistic, bourgeois, individualistic, personal, and conjugal—and it was in the oscillation and struggle between these two competing "families"—these two social, religious, political, and cultural formations—that the uncanniness and anxiety in the Gothic imaginary was created. Because this culture could not turn away from God, it chose to be haunted by his uncanny avatars: priests, corrupt monks, incestuous fathers and uncles. The Gothic was, in fact, extremely effective at keeping all of the *ne plus ultra* of the supernatural alive, for instance, ghosts, witches, necromancy, exorcism, the occult, and the devil. The repetitious trappings of the uncanny and what I would identify as animism or magical thinking continue to permeate the reading materials and theatrical performances that the lower class and newly bourgeois citizens attended in Britain, France, and Germany, but they did so in performances that sometimes explained away the supernatural in favor of the codes of the Enlightenment: reason, order, and clarity, and sometimes they did not.

In the British Gothic imaginary, the Illuminati became interchangeable with the Jesuits because both groups were secretive, fanatical, and anti-Protestant. Novels like Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797), Mrs. Patrick's *The Jesuit* (1799), and Godwin's *St. Leon* (1799) all capitalized on the vogue for anti-Catholic hysteria (Miles, "The 1790s," 52). The Gothic charts the ongoing effort to kill Catholicism over a period lasting more than two hundred years in all its convoluted and complicated moves. One of the most persistent tropes in the Gothic is the exposure, punishment, and usually death of a corrupt duke or monk, and certainly in this repetitive action we can see ritualized the killing of a bad, illegitimate king (read: legitimation of a *British* king) or the erasure of a God of superstition (read: fidelity to a *Protestant* God).

The rationality and self-control that were so highly prized by Protestant individualism and Enlightenment ideology move to center stage in the Gothic, creating a new cultural ideal that chastised idolatry, superstition, hierarchy, and popery in all its forms. But one would hardly characterize the Gothic as a uniformly consistent Enlightenment genre. In fact, the Gothic is actually a series of nostalgic and ambivalent gestures, conflicted and contradictory poses, a mode of writing composed by authors who mixed piety with equal parts of political and social anxiety. Whereas Catholicism was accused of using the confessional to absolve the most heinous of sins, Protestantism insisted on the unmediated internalization of individual conscience (i.e., that no clergyman could absolve anyone of their sins, as this could only be done within the "closet" of one's own conscience). But how can a society be based on trust in each individual's conscience if, in fact, our own life experiences inform us all too clearly that evil or at least ill will towards others lurks in every bosom? Whereas the sentimental ethos clung to the notion of the "noble savage" or the inherent perfectibility of the untainted human subject, the Gothic was willing to confront the inadequate explanations provided by Protestantism to basic spiritual concerns: how to understand the persistent mystery of human cruelty, corruption, and finally, death.

The issues of religion, the supernatural, and "God" take on the forms of atavistic mania in a number of Gothic works, such as James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) or Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), both published during the height of pamphleteering for and against the cause of Catholic Emancipation in England. Hogg's *Confessions*, for instance, satirizes the Calvinist doctrine of the internalized conscience as being above the laws of society or, in fact, the Ten

Commandments, for the "saved" characters in that novel fancy themselves as answerable only to their own (rather peculiar) consciences. It also presents the devil, Gil-Martin, less as a supernatural being and more as a psychic projection of the hero, Robert Wringhim, an actual physical manifestation of his religious mania. Maturin, a Church of Ireland clergyman, was so invested in the anti-Catholic agenda that he published a tract entitled *Five Sermons on the Errors of the Roman Catholic Church* (1824), while his *Melmoth* depicts a man who has sold his soul to the devil and then spends his expanded lifespan of 150 years trying to find someone else who will relieve him of his bargain.

Strikingly similar to the plot of Giacomo Meyerbeer's later opera *Robert le Diable* (1831)*, Melmoth* reveals how clearly the Gothic was committed, even if ambivalently, to charting the evils of the old world of Catholicism, communalism, feudalism, and the rise in its place of the Protestant subject. An epic work that contains five concentric novels within the master narrative, *Melmoth* presents eternity, the soul, the devil, and the riddle of human suffering very literally and, one is tempted to observe, at the same time as components of an almost magical or performative belief system. At one point in the text, Monçada is tortured in a monastery by the temptations proffered by artificial demons and he exclaims, "When art assumes the omnipotence of reality, when we feel we suffer as much from an illusion as from truth, our sufferings lose all dignity and all consolation" (157). Shortly later, however, the narrator explains how that illusion has replaced truth when he notes, "In Catholic countries, . . . religion is the national drama" (165). But the publication date—1820—was late and by the time Balzac wrote his own satiric and ironic sequel to the novel, *Melmoth Reconcilié à L'Eglise* (1835), the date was even later. France during the 1830s had been racked by anti-Catholic riots and

attacks on Catholic churches that recalled those of the earlier Revolution. Balzac's novel

is in fact less a *hommage* than a bitter retort, suggesting how absurdly impossible it

would be for a writer like the Huguenot Maturin, who had spent hundreds of pages

depicting the horrors of the Inquisition or of scheming Jesuits attempting to steal a young

man's inheritance, to ever be reconciled to such a monstrously corrupt institution.

Traces of an almost cartoonish Catholicism[4]—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 decent burial, 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—

continue to appear in Gothic works as what I would identify as the residual uncanny, the

persistently strange and yet seductive elements of this earlier system of belief. 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

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[4] See Victoria Nelson, who has defined what she calls the "Faux Catholic," a "sub-genre

from Monk Lewis to Dan Brown." 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 anti-clerical 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 Jesuit their confessor. Translated out of French* (London:

1691), cited by Godwin as an influence on his *Caleb Williams*.

was the first Whig "prime minister" of England, while Matthew Lewis served as a Whig member of parliament for one term. The Whig's 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. The secularizing of the uncanny, then, is an attempt by a modernizing, Protestant-inflected social imaginary to strip these atavistic practices of their power and, indeed, the magical properties that they still seemed to hold over the public imagination.

Because the anti-Catholic agenda is so voluminous and because it has at least three emphases (see above), this essay can only touch briefly on some of its major manifestations. First, the emphasis on the sexual perversion of a celibate priest or monk, as seen in Lewis's novel *The Monk* and later in the notorious *Maria Monk* narratives, can be traced, as I mentioned earlier, to the case of Father Girard, a French Jesuit accused of seducing one of the nuns over whom he had spiritual direction: Mary Catharine Cadière. This case was so notorious in France that it spawned a virtual publication industry in chapbooks and pornographic materials, and became a play in 1732 in the hands of the anti-Catholic Henry Fielding as *The Debauchees: or, the Jesuit Caught* (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" (Haydon 38). It also, I am convinced, was part of the impetus for Matthew Lewis's depiction of Ambrosio's rape of his sister Antonia in *The Monk* and a

number of the more sensationalized "captive nun" narratives in later Gothic texts. In order to connect the dots here, let me point out that we know, for instance, 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. Given their knowledge of Fielding's works as well as the extensive visits that both of them made to Paris, it is more than probable that both Walpole and Lewis would have been familiar with the notorious story, both through Fielding's depiction of the episode, as well as its widespread graphic and pornographic depiction in the French popular press.[5]

In addition to the sexual perversion theme, there is a clear focus in a variety of Gothics on clergy as political meddlers, practitioners of "priestcraft," and orchestrators of the Inquisition, which they are seen as being keen to import to British soil. As Jacqueline Howard has observed, popular fiction in the 1790s had "a strong anti-Catholic bias" (229), and dwelt almost obsessively on the motifs of the secret society (read: 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. A

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[5]Fielding's suspected involvement in a pamphlet campaign against Horace Walpole's father Robert is discussed in Jarvis; 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*, xxv. Lewis's productions of Fielding's works are discussed in Macdonald, 158.

number of these anti-catholic Gothic works actually originated in either France (for instance, the Girard scandal leading to Diderot's *The Nun* [1759] and then to Genlis's inset history of the "beautiful nun" Cecilia in *Adèle and Théodore* [1782]) or Germany (Schiller's *Ghost-Seer* [1789] or Kotzebue's *Joseph Pignata*). Other particularly popular German works that were quickly translated into English were Cajetan Tschink's *Victim of Magical Delusions* (trans. 1795), a three volume novel that denounced apparitions and praised Martin Luther for restoring reason to religious belief; 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, but there is also in these male-authored novels more than a whiff of misogyny and virulent nationalism.

Speaking of misogyny, Horace Walpole, author of the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* as well as the first Gothic drama, the misogynistic *The Mysterious Mother* (1768), went so far as to call himself a "Protestant Goth," and referred to Catholicism as "Superstition's papal gloom" (McWhir 37). He was, however, fascinated with Catholic ritual and was a descendant of Father Henry Walpole, executed as a Jesuit in 1595. The Gothic, as I have noted, seeks simultaneously to exploit superstition at the same time it condemns it. 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 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." The Walpole family at Houghton is presented as 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" (qtd. Shell 35). Walpole may have sided intellectually with those who usurped church property, but there is clearly an approach-avoidance dance that we can see enacted in *The Castle of Otranto* and certainly, we hear alternately of his attraction and repulsion to Catholicism in his letters.

Although the Catholic Relief Act finally passed Parliament in 1829, it certainly did not quell lingering anti-Catholic sentiment among the British lower classes. Catholics as potential and persistent threats were never far from the edges of besieged British consciousness. In 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" (*The Lives of the Novelists*, I, 198).

For Scott, Catholicism posed a political and nationalistic threat to Britain, 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, that sort of despotic power, the exercise of which seldom fails to deprave the heart and disorder the judgement" (I, 198). By the time John Henry Newman converted to Roman Catholicism in 1845, fear of a traitorous faction within had increased yet again to a fever

pitch in Britain, seen most vividly in one of the most eccentric Gothic novels ever written: John Russell's *The Jesuit in England; With the Horrors of the Inquisition in Rome* (1858).

Literary critics have long been puzzled by the Gothic. Hyperbolic, sprawling, embarrassingly melodramatic and sentimental, ideologically contradictory, the genre has been the unwanted stepchild of the romantic period since its inception. For many years, in fact, the Gothic was quietly ignored, tucked away like some odd family relation that was better off kept in an asylum. And when the Gothic was brought into the light of day, dusted off, and scrutinized, critics were confused about exactly what they were examining. As the Marquis de Sade suggested, the Gothic arose during a time of not simply political revolution, but of rapid intellectual, social, economic, and religious upheaval, and in many ways the new discourses of Sentimentality, melodrama, and the Gothic contained within themselves both their ostensible concerns—containment of anxiety about the forces of change—as well as their opposites—rampant flirtation with and exploration of those fears.

The Gothic arose 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, superstitions like ghosts, witches, the mysterious powers of saints, the Virgin Mary, confessions, bread and wine, and, for the most extreme of rationalists, perhaps the existence of God and the soul itself. While William Hogarth's famous print, "Credulity, Superstition, and Fanaticism" (1762), satirizes the notoriety of a number of contemporary superstitions, it also reveals ironically that reforming Protestant sects were as invested in a variety of superstitions as Catholicism had been. Hogarth's print represents one side of

the secularized mind's disdain for antiquated beliefs of the past, in this case Methodist

enthusiasts, but it clearly does not represent the full range of the European imaginary, as

witnessed by any number of popular and widespread Gothic illustrations and

performances that suggest that the Enlightenment world-view was not a psychic space

that everyone was quite so quick to enter.[6]   Indeed, there were no talismans against that

ultimate embodiment of the uncanny, our consciousness of our own eventual deaths, and

it was this realization that emerged so clearly in the majority of Gothic works.

Death would appear to be the ultimate embodiment of the obsessive uncanny

other, that aspect of our environment that we cannot control with recourse to charms,

omens, or some sort of magic. This was a culture in which science had successfully

provided many answers to questions that had been mysterious or inexplicable in the past,

but the Enlightenment project could not explain the ultimate conundrum: how to live with

the knowledge of our own eventual demise. That question, as Freud and more recently

Ernest Becker have shown, haunts the psyche to such an extent that there is no escape

from it except through repression, rationalization, or finally demonization of others who

threaten the "death-denying" ideologies that we have created in order to deny our

knowledge of death. The Gothic aesthetic arose when the plausibility and explanatory

force of magic and superstitious beliefs declined and no clearly consistent or

satisfactorily definitive system arose to answer the questions and anxieties that inevitably

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[6]An extensive discussion of the performative Gothic genres: operas, melodramas, dramas,

chapbooks, and ballads, and their relation to questions of secularization is provided in my

Gothic Riffs.

continued to persist. In its repetitive recourse to unresolved spiritual issues, the Gothic

mediates present and past, living and dead, Protestant and Catholic, modern and

antiquated.

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