

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CATHOLICISM IN
GOTHIC NOVELS, 1790 – 1816: A REVALUATION**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis challenges the prevailing critical view that Gothic is a vehicle for anti-Catholic, anticlerical sentiment. Its aim is to point an oversight in the critical study of Gothic. This thesis traces Gothic's motifs to sentimental Catholic literary works dating back to the late 1600s, the themes of which were popular with English writers throughout the eighteenth century. Part of this investigation reveals the popularity of Catholic aesthetics in English sentimental culture throughout the eighteenth century. The argument then focuses upon several little known Gothic novels written in the period 1790-1816 in which Catholic monastic characters are the heroes and heroines of the narrative, used to define and demonstrate the value and superiority of Christian piety in a world of unruly emotion and unchecked sensibility. This thesis connects the didacticism of these novels with the conservative counterrevolutionary discourse of the same period shaped most famously by Edmund Burke which emphasized the sanctity and supremacy of adhering to the religious tradition of one's forefathers as ballast against Dissent, Jacobinism and secularism, and evoked nostalgia for medieval England whose national character was strongly marked by religious devotion and loyalty to God's chosen monarch. Burke's discourse contributed to a climate of rehabilitation for Catholics manifest in the legislation that led both to the Relief Acts of 1791 and 1793, and the support for the French émigré priests and religious who fled revolutionary persecution to find sanctuary, practice their religion, and resettle their communities in England during the 1790s and early 1800s. This study argues the necessity for a modification of our map of Gothic based on a larger corpus of works and on a reevaluation of the way Catholicism was received and perceived in eighteenth-century England.

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

The work presented in this thesis was undertaken by the author between October 1998 and April 2004. No part of this work had been published or submitted for publication at time of submission.

INTRODUCTION

Though much about the literary Gothic of the long eighteenth century, including even its status as a genre,¹ has been called into question by recent scholarship, one aspect remains virtually uncontested: its prejudice against Catholicism. This study aims to open up this area of the Gothic to question. At the heart of this thesis are several little- or unknown Gothic novels written in the period 1790-1816. These novels complicate the orthodox critical reading of Gothic as a vehicle for anti-Catholic, anticlerical sentiment. They make Catholic monastic characters heroic, and use them to define and demonstrate the value and superiority of Christian piety in a world of unruly emotion and unchecked sensibility. I seek to show a correlation between the didacticism of these novels, and the conservative counterrevolutionary discourse of the same period, shaped most famously by Edmund Burke. This discourse emphasized the sanctity and supremacy of adhering to the religious tradition of one's forefathers, as ballast against Dissent, Jacobinism and secularism, and evoked nostalgia for medieval England, whose national character was strongly marked by religious devotion and loyalty to God's chosen monarch. Significantly, this discourse contributed to a climate of already increased toleration and support for Catholics by evoking the contributions made by the Church of England's religious forebears to the grand foundations of social order in Britain; and by upholding Catholics as current co-religionists in orthodoxy. As well as the passing of two Catholic Relief Acts in 1791 and 1793, the effects of increased sympathy can be seen most clearly in England's constructive response to the French émigré priests and religious who fled revolutionary persecution to find sanctuary, practise their religion, and in many cases resettle their communities in England during the 1790s and early 1800s.

This thesis suggests that it was a climate of sympathy that made possible the sympathetic representations of Catholicism in the Gothic novels introduced here. It argues that a spectrum of opinions on Catholicism rather than an absolute anti-Catholicism coloured the years when the Gothic novel flourished, and we should therefore be encouraged to question the authenticity of seemingly anti-Catholic postures in the more famous Gothic novels.

¹ Robert Miles has discussed Gothic as a discursive site which crosses the genres (*Gothic writing, 1750-1820. A genealogy* [London; New York: Routledge, 1993]). Michael Gamer has added to this discourse with his concept of the Gothic functioning as an aesthetic (*Romanticism & the Gothic: Genre, Reception & Canon Formation*, Cambridge University Press, 2000). James Watt, too, has argued that Gothic as a "unitary genre..is a twentieth-century invention": its original status was "as an assimilative literary hybrid" (*Contesting the Gothic-Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict*, [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], p.3).

A broader study of this subject might seek to explore a range of Gothic novels from the passing of the Catholic Relief Acts right up to the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829. However I have chosen to focus on the period 1790-1816: the years during which the Gothic novel peaked in popularity. Not only does this fertile period offer an abundance of works from which to conduct a study, but it seems to me to be the most apposite phase in Gothic's arguably ongoing development on which to base any argument about the rudiments of the genre. In the analysis of Gothic's Catholic motifs however this study is a little less chronologically constrained: indeed it is necessary to refer to works dating as far back as the late seventeenth century, for it is from monastic figures such as Abélard and Héloïse, I will argue, that Gothic's monks and nuns are descended.

I

J.M.S Tompkins was the first to argue that "the prejudice against Catholicism, or, more particularly, against priests and monks, the "anti-Romanbray'...is heard at its loudest in both the English and the German novels of terror".¹ Leslie Fiedler agreed that "the gothic romance is ...the most blatantly anti-Catholic [form of novel] of all, projecting in its fables a consistent image of the Church as the Enemy".² Later critics have concurred: "Anti-Catholic sensibilities are blatant in gothic fiction" states Diane Hoeveler,³ whilst James Whitlark speaks of the "pervasiveness of anti-Catholicism in the Gothic novels", claiming that "a typical Gothic novel is not just about the deserved punishments of Catholics but also their guilty pleasures".⁴ According to Anne McWhir "some Gothic novels are almost anti-Catholic propaganda".⁵ The prevailing critical view is that the Gothic is virtually a means of anti-Catholic expression.

The scholarship generated by the surge of interest in writers such as Walpole, Lewis, Radcliffe and Maturin in the early decades of the twentieth century has shaped our ideas of what defines the 'typical' Gothic novel. The network of conventions linking these popular novels was quickly established as the conventions of the Gothic mode. One of these

¹ J. M. S. Tompkins, *Ann Radcliffe and her Influence on Later Writers* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), p.104.

² Leslie Fiedler, "The Substitution of Terror for Love", *The Gothick Novel*, ed. Victor Sage (London, 1990), pp.130-139, p.137.

³ Diane Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism, the Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontes* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), p.52.

⁴ James Whitlark, "Heresy Hunting: *The Monk* and the French Revolution", *Romanticism On the Net*, 8 (November 1997), <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat0385/heresy.html>

⁵ Anne McWhir, "The Gothic Transgression of Disbelief: Walpole, Radcliffe, Lewis," *Gothic Fictions: Prohibition/Transgression*, ed. Kenneth Graham, (New York: AMS Press, 1989), pp.29-48, p.36.

principles was what critics identified as a fascination with Catholicism that was “neither theological nor ecclesiastical in emphasis”.¹ In other words, Gothic’s use of Catholic motifs, its images from medieval religious traditions, was perceived to have no sacramental meaning. Rather, according to critics such as Kiely, “the trappings of the Roman Church provided an exotic background, but, more than that, they were symbols of superstition, fanaticism, and odd behaviour” (p.31). Montague Summers was the first to argue that the Catholic motifs in Gothic works were devoid of meaning and merely decorative: “The authors employed abbots and convents, friars and cloisters, “cowled monks with scapulars,” “veiled nuns with rosaries,” because such properties were exotic, they were mysterious, and capable of the highest romantic treatment.”² Catholic motifs in the Gothic novel, according to this argument, are used mostly to evoke an exciting past world, the medieval world. With this reading scholars tend to argue that the representation of Catholicism is a negative one. As Tompkins has argued, “[Gothic writers] are very conscious of the picturesque attractions of convents, vows of celibacy, confession and penance; they are seduced by the emotional possibilities of the situations that can be based on these usages; but they seldom fail to make it quite clear that they regard the usages as superstitious and irrational.”³ Fiedler argued that “Like most other classic forms of the novel, the gothic romance is Protestant in ethos” (p.137) retaining a ‘natural’ aversion to Catholic ‘superstition’ and ‘priestcraft’. But more explicitly critics have argued, the Gothic romance is essentially Whiggish, evoking the past in the manner of Whig historians who believed that “that since Protestants were always progressive, Catholics, in opposing them, were always reactionary, fighting for the past”.⁴ Gothic novelists too, in the eyes of many critics, made it their practice to embody these assumptions in the creation of the past “as a site of conflict between progressives and reactionaries” (Mighall, p.7)⁵ where Protestant characters fight to demystify the oppressive schemes of feudal Catholicism.

¹ Robert Kiely, *The Romantic Novel in England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p.31.

² Montague Summers, *The Gothic Quest, a History of the Gothic Novel*, (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), p.196.

³ J.M.S Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800*, (London: Constable and Co. Ltd., 1932), p.274.

⁴Kevin L. Morris, *The Image of the Middle Ages in Romantic and Victorian Literature* (London: Dover, N.H.: Croom Helm,1984), cited in Robert Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p.6. See Raymond D. Tumbleson, *Catholicism in the English Protestant Imagination: Nationalism, Religion, and Literature, 1660-1745* (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁵Fiedler says “the gothic felt for the first time the pastness of the past” (p.136).

However Summers made it quite clear that there is not any *militant* Protestantism “of the John Kensit or Cliniquy school” in the Gothic novelists (p.195).¹ Generally, it has been consistently argued, what motivates the Gothic writers’ treatment of Catholicism in their novels is the combined influence of several inherited Protestant attitudes and positions. For Victor Sage for example the term Gothic “connotes a whole complex of popular theological ideas of a predominantly..Protestant variety.”² In Sage’s reading, for example, Protestant doctrines which “postulate a theological relation between individual identity and national sovereignty” are the source of many anti-Catholic stereotypes (p.19). Generally however critics seem to favour the idea that a mixture of Protestant “complacency”³ and “historical fears” lie behind Gothic’s supposedly negative representation of Catholicism.⁴ All Gothic novelists, Kiely claims, used Roman Catholicism “primarily for the show of it – and for [their] Protestant readers, the obviously empty show of it” (p.110). Of the later twentieth-century critics, Baldick conclusively argues for a popular reading in which “the consciously Protestant pioneers of the Gothic novel raise the old ghosts of Catholic Europe only to exorcize them”, citing “sectarian alarm” as the cause of what he describes as Gothic’s “nervous Protestant fascination with Catholic aristocrats and monks”.⁵ Hoeveler, too, detects the influence of Protestant fear on the Gothic representation of Catholicism: “the Roman Catholic Church and its network of abbeys, convents, and secret tribunals..runs as a sort of leitmotif throughout the gothic novel, reifying British and Enlightenment dread of medievalism, superstition, and uninformed prejudice” (p.52).⁶

The Protestant securities and insecurities that nourish the Gothic imagination are filtered through other currents of English thought – notably those which inform eighteenth-century English ‘sensibility’, the aesthetic code by which the middle ranks of society carve an emotional identity separate from the fashions, ideals and structures of the aristocracy.⁷ In

¹ Frank David Kievitt is agreeing with Summers when he argues that “anti-Catholicism of the Smollett and Fielding variety is all but absent in [the Gothic novelists’] work” (Frank David Kievitt, “Attitudes Towards Roman Catholicism in the later Eighteenth-Century English Novel”, diss., University of Columbia, 1975, p.306; see also p.315).

² Victor Sage, *Horror Fiction in the Protestant Tradition* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), p.22.

³ Tompkins speaks of “a thrill of that warm complacency which always stole through the British bosom when meditating Continental tyrannies” (*Popular Novel*, p.276).

⁴ Chris Baldick, introduction, *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.21.

⁵ Baldick, ps. 14 and 21.

⁶ Mighall notes “the frisson of confrontation” that the Gothic novelist is at power to evoke through his/her representation of Catholic “anachronisms”, symbolic of the horrors of the “dark ages” (p.7). See also McWhir *passim*.

⁷ Sensibility was a cult of middle-class construction, a code for the emerging commercial, consumer class who felt disenfranchised from the hierarchical infrastructure that informed aristocratic values and mores. Markham Ellis describes sensibility accurately as “the space between more extreme constructions”, meaning the

her analysis of Catholicism in the Gothic novel, Mary Tarr argues that Gothic writers engage with their Catholic materials in two distinct yet connected ways. Firstly, “when Catholic materials are apprehended intellectually..the attitude is expressed in terms of a spirited deistical attack upon “monkish superstition””.¹ This “attitude” is underpinned by Deism, and the ‘natural morality’ of Shaftesburian ethic. These modes of eighteenth-century thought rejected the doctrines of organized religion in favour of a free-thinking theology and an humanitarian approach to morality.² Secondly, Tarr argues, “when Catholic materials are apprehended emotionally..the resultant attitude is expressed in terms of a melodramatic sentimentality that revels in “melancholy pleasure’, “divine horror”, and “religious awe”” (p.121). According to Tarr, Gothic ‘mines’ Catholic materials and motifs for their sublime potential which, as Kievitt notes, follows Burke’s blueprint for the production of the sublime. Tarr argues that Gothic writers use Catholic materials to create sublime moments in the narrative – a moment of irrational fear at the sudden appearance of a mysterious cowed character, or awe inspired by the sight of a candlelit funeral procession in the vaults of a monastery for example - and at the same time regularly signal their relief that their readers, whilst capable of enjoying such moments, have the critical faculties to keep irrational fear, awe, etc., in its place. Meanwhile the enlightened reader, presupposing the irrationality and absurdity of Catholic practices and beliefs, takes pleasure in the “imaginative freedoms and symbolic possibilities” that the representations of such “discarded folk beliefs” afford, according to Whitlark (p.13). As McWhir says, “no one believes in them, but through the art of language we can discover what it would be like if we did” (p.39).

The most frequently discussed episodes in any analysis of religious prejudice in the Gothic occur in Matthew Lewis’ *The Monk*, Ann Radcliffe’s *Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* and Charles Robert Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer*. Horace Walpole’s representation of Catholicism in *The Castle of Otranto* is less frequently discussed by critics as it seems to be the product of “antiquarian fondness” (Tompkins, p.189) rather than

constructions that had always defined English social behaviour (*The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.7). Sensibility came out of earlier enlightenment discourses on the innateness of the source of our moral impulses: consequently it might be said to have been marking the progress of secularization.

¹ Mary Muriel Tarr, *Catholicism in Gothic Fiction* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1946), p.121.

² The Earl of Shaftesbury famously brought into question the conventional link between religion and (moral) virtue in *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, (1711). By insisting that man is innately benevolent and that his benevolence springs from the joy of self-approval when helping others, Shaftesbury liberated morality from the domain of organized religion (and even reason). Shaftesbury’s philosophy was undoubtedly important for the cult of sensibility whose objective was the definition of a new set of behavioural guidelines for the ‘modern’ man and woman of integrity.

prejudice, and is of interest to such critics only “in its aspect as emblem of the irrational” (Kiely, p.31). *The Monk* however seems ripe with blatant anti-Catholic, anti-Church sentiment: indeed it begins with a description of the corruption of a Madrid congregation:

Do not encourage the idea that the Crowd was assembled either from motives of piety or thirst for information. In a city where superstition reigns with such despotic sway as in Madrid, to seek for true devotion would be a fruitless attempt.¹

This, Jacqueline Howard says, “is the opening gambit in a sustained attack...on the hypocrisy, superstition, and moral corruption of the Catholic Church” in which “the focus of the novel’s indictment [shifts] from hypocrisy and the falsity of cloistered virtue to the Church’s adherence to superstition, deception, and...its monstrous abuse of power.”² According to critics, Catholicism in *The Monk* is fiendish – “demonized”³ according to Steven Blakemore, its practitioners “corrupt and corrupting...—quite literally—the devil’s advocates” as Syndy Conger argues.⁴ It is well known that Lewis went to see the fiercely anti-clerical plays staged during the Revolution in Paris and critics usually maintain that he appropriated much of his anti-Catholic material from these dramas,⁵ as well as from the German works from which he drew so much inspiration.⁶

¹ Matthew Lewis, *The Monk*, 1796 (New York: Grove Press, 1952), p.35. All further references will be to this edition.

² Jacqueline Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction, a Bakhtinian Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), ps.192 and 193.

³ Steven Blakemore, “Matthew Lewis’ Black Mass: Sexual, Religious Inversion in *The Monk*”, *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 30, 4, Winter 1998, pp. 521-540, p.524.

⁴ Syndy M. Conger, “Confessors and Penitents in M. G. Lewis’s *The Monk*”, *Romanticism On the Net*. 8 (November 1997), <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat0385/confessors.html>

⁵ See George Taylor, *French Revolution & the London Stage, 1789-1805* (Port Chester, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001):

“Particularly popular were plays on the closure of monasteries and convents, like *Le Couvent; ou, les Fruits de l’education*, *Les victimes cloîtreés*, *Les Capucins* and *Le Déménagement du cure’*, which presented either the sins of the clergy or the rescue of young women incarcerated by their families. Although intended to dramatise recent scandals and the forcible closure of monasteries by the National Guard, they were closely related to the Gothic horror stories already available in the novels of de Sade and soon to be dramatised in the melodramas of ‘Pixere’ court. Indeed *Les victimes cloîtreés* was adapted into English by the radical Samuel Birch and presented at Covent Garden, 18 December 1798, as *Albert and Adelaide*, and was adapted again by Matthew Lewis in 1808 as *Venoni*. In the English context these plays could be read as traditionally antiCatholic, but they also indicate how the Revolutionary culture of France influenced the British taste for Gothic allegory” (pp.80-81).

⁶ See Syndy Conger, *Matthew G. Lewis, Charles Robert Maturin and the Germans: An Interpretative Study of the Influence of German Literature on Two Gothic Novels* (Salzburg, 1977).

In discussions of Gothic's use of Catholicism critics tend to concentrate on a few well-known episodes, such as the opening scene of *The Monk*. They also focus on one or two elements that seem to have become crucial to any treatment of the topic. One of these elements, which Mighall claims to be "an important part of Gothic convention", is when "virtuous characters in Gothic romances are also honorary Protestants" (p.12) or, when 'good' European Catholic characters find themselves not speaking as Catholics, but as enlightened English Protestants, "their statements...pervaded with a sense of relief that the eighteenth century has been delivered from the fanatic superstition of earlier times",¹ or illustrating the virtues of "the vague and hopeful Deism" of sensibility (Tompkins, p.106). According to Sage, Ann Radcliffe is a renowned performer of this distinctly Whiggish trope, which Sage calls "a kind of pamphleteering, in which the searchlight of Protestant rationality is turned on Romish supersition" (p.148). In the world of Radcliffian "pamphleteering", Catholic heroines prefer to offer up prayers to "heaven" in the open air, rather than to the Virgin in a lady chapel, and good abbesses conform "to the customs of the Roman church, without supposing a faith in them to be necessary to salvation"² (see Geary, p.56). Heroes display a 'healthy' rational skepticism when confronted with a "potentially superstitious situation" (Sage, p.151): Hoeveler argues compellingly that their actions, as they are forced into the vaults of the Inquisition or drawn into rescuing the heroine from the clutches of an evil abbess, represent the excavation "of an unpleasant historical era...[the reification] of the Protestant/English consciousness confronting its own buried and repressed primitive/Catholic past" (p.116).³

Representations of the Inquisition are also a crucial element of any discussion of anti-Catholicism in the Gothic. Summers speaks of "a long list of novels... in which the Holy Office is introduced", but, like the majority of critics, only mentions specifically "the most famous" (p.194).⁴ It was inevitable that the Gothic Romance...should turn to the Inquisition for material" states Tompkins, for "'Protestant abomination" and "philosophical disapproval" had "combined in the eighteenth century to make this theme an eminently lively

¹ Tarr, p.21. See also Sage, p. 30-31, 150-6; Hoeveler, p.98; *Melmoth the Wanderer*, introduction, ed. Douglas Grant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.14; Robert F. Geary, *The Supernatural in Gothic Fiction* (New York: Ontario: Wales: The Edward Mellen Press, 1992), p.44-45; Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle : Gothic novels and the subversion of domestic ideology* (Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 1989).

² Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian or the Confessional of the Black Penitents*, 1797, (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.300.

³ Radcliffe's imitators tended to replicate both the doctrinal ventriloquism of her honorary-Protestant characters, and the "overtly modern and Protestant consciousness [that] permeates and organizes [her] material" (Mighall, p.13). See Tarr, pp.44-73.

⁴ See also Hoeveler on Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*, p.156; Mark Madoff, "The Secret Chief of Conspiracies", *English Studies in Canada* 6 (1980), pp.409-20.

one” (p.95). As if to complicate her own claim however, Tompkins notes that Pierre Jean Grosley, Radcliffe’s main source for information on Italy,¹ had “belittled the power of the Roman Inquisition in the most unromantic way” by claiming that since the 1600s the tribunal had been involved in nothing more horrible than the handing out of spiritual and pecuniary penalties (p.95). That this did not deter Radcliffe from painting racks and hooded attendants in her portrayal of the holy office of 1758 in *The Italian or the Confessional of the Black Penitents* (1797), Tompkins finds “delightful”, a typical example of the tendency to become complicit in anti-Catholic myth that accompanies the Gothic imagination. As Sage argues however, Radcliffe goes on to “[break] the crude stereotype” (p.153) by portraying the chief Inquisitor as a reasonable, honourable judge who seems to embody a “qualified defence”² of the institution. This portrayal urges us to question Tompkin’s assumption - as does Lewis’ depiction of the tribunal. Lewis’ Inquisition justly accuses Matilda and Ambrosio of sorcery (they have indeed conjured Satan and used black magic) yet is reasonable in its treatment of the erring monk – he was, we are led to believe by a gloating Satan in possession of Ambrosio’s soul, to have been pardoned. Summers is disappointed by a 1797 novel entitled *The Inquisition* which “falls short” of expectation in terms of luxuriant depictions of red-eyed, black-hooded “familiars” and “a Grand Inquisitor more murderous than Timur Khan” – amazingly, he notes, the Grand Inquisitor is described as having a face in which “openness and judgement were..chief characteristics” (p.193). Nevertheless, episodes featuring the Inquisition remain as a distinguishing mark of Gothic’s alleged animosity towards the Roman Church.³

How do critics explain “anti-Catholic sensibilities” being so “blatant” in Gothic fiction? Historical evaluations point to the tradition of anti-Catholicism in Protestant culture reflected in the novel – a characteristically Protestant literary form⁴ – from its origination.⁵ They also highlight the influence of French and German anti-Catholic and anti-clerical works on English Gothic writers. However I want to look more closely at Sage’s hypothesis. Sage

¹ In *New Observations upon Italy and its Inhabitants written in French by Two Swedish Gentlemen*, (1769).

² James Watt, *Contesting the Gothic– Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.118.

³ See Douglass H. Thompson, *Glossary of Literary Gothic Terms*, 2001 [http:// www2.gasou.edu/facstaff/dougth/goth.html#info](http://www2.gasou.edu/facstaff/dougth/goth.html#info)

⁴ Critics have argued convincingly that the autobiographies of Pepys, Boswell and Rousseau and novels such as Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* were born of the Protestant habit of introspection, which remained a feature of the English imagination even when religious belief had weakened. The device of self-scrutiny was important to the ‘confessional’ (the confessional narrative is a peculiarly Protestant mode), autobiographical genres, indeed all forms of realism. See Ian P. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel; studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957) and Valentine Cunningham, *Everywhere Spoken Against: Dissent in the Victorian Novel* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1975).

⁵ See Tumbleton, chapter 6; see also Kievitt.

proposes quite precisely “that the rise and currency of literary Gothic is strongly related to the growth of the campaign for Catholic Emancipation¹ from the 1770s onward” (p.28-29). This argument will be one of particular importance for this thesis, which will in the next few chapters extend and expand Sage’s proposal with new findings that lead to an entirely different conclusion.

Sage tends to sketch the background against which he positions his argument, which feeds into an analysis of the 1790s novels of Ann Radcliffe (p.32). He argues the relative security of the position of Catholics in England during the later eighteenth century by citing the growth of ‘pressure’ for Emancipation, drawing attention to the fact that many Catholics were wealthy members of the gentry, and noting that the King turned a blind eye to the laws against active Catholic worship.² The conclusion to be drawn from these factors is that Catholicism was generally tolerated in England before 1780: it was practised by a wealthy and influential minority and existing penal laws were under threat of reformation or abolition. However, Sage argues, the Gordon Riots introduced a complete change in the atmosphere of toleration and led to profound and widespread insecurity in the 1790s. Consequently the émigré Catholics driven to English shores during the Revolution were viewed with suspicion by the English public. Sage is arguing that the rhetoric of Radcliffe’s novels *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* taps into this insecurity: a widespread national anxiety based on the great fear of Roman Catholics gaining in numbers and security, and being granted freedoms which would allow them to play a greater part in English society. He suggests that Radcliffe’s novels foreground anti-Catholic characterizations of duplicitous, equivocal, ‘cowled’ and secretive monks as a warning “which has directly theological meaning” (p.34): for Radcliffe was descended from a long line of “impeccably orthodox”

¹ The Relief Acts in 1778, 1791 and 1793 freed Catholics from some of the more prohibitive aspects of the Penal Laws. In 1774 the Quebec Act gave official recognition to the rights of the Catholic Church in Lower Canada and this added to the impetus for Catholic emancipation in Britain. The Act of 1778 allowed Catholics to take an oath in which they denounced Stuart claims to the throne and denied the civil jurisdiction of the Pope. The taking of this oath gave them the right to purchase and inherit land legally. The Act also put a formal end to the prosecution of Catholic priests by informers. The Act of 1791 re-opened the professions to Catholics, although they were still barred from certain universities, including Oxford. The Act also gave legal existence to registered Catholic places of worship, provided that the officiating clergy took an oath of allegiance. The Act of 1793 gave Irish Catholics the parliamentary and municipal franchise and enabled them to become jurors, magistrates, sheriffs, and officers in the army and navy. They were also admitted to the degrees of Trinity College. Finally the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 permitted Roman Catholics to sit in Parliament, vote at elections and hold civil and military office subject to a new compound oath which replaced the old oaths of allegiance, supremacy and abjuration.

² Sage’s claim of collusion in high places is easy to verify. For example in 1764 George III’s lacemaker Bryan Barrett commissioned Stephen Wright, master-mason in the Office of Works, to add wings containing a new Roman Catholic chapel to his house. By choosing such a prominent mason it is clear that Barrett was not under any pressure to keep the building of the chapel a secret.

Dutch Protestants.¹ For her “the ‘sly and monkish countenance’ is there throughout history and never more so than in the present, despite the fact that in her England the monastic orders were prohibited” (p.33).

Sage has established the argument that the Gothic novel operates as a response to English/Protestant anxiety in the face of a heightened awareness of the possibility of Catholic Emancipation, and the retreat from progress and modernity that a repeal of the Penal Laws would ultimately signify.² The readers of Gothic novels were amongst the polite, educated classes. They were enlightened, secular - Geary speaks of “an audience for whom... the doctrine of a Particular Providence was absolutely out of fashion” (p.18). Critics argue that they would undoubtedly have shared Radcliffe’s suspicions and anxieties. Lewis could have expected his attack on the Catholic Church “to be accepted uncritically by his English audience” (Howard, p.192). Indeed the young author’s rhetoric, as well as that of Radcliffe in *Udolpho*, and that of Maturin, “uses the anti-Catholic prejudice of the audience as a tactic to gain acceptance” (Sage, *Gothick Novel*, p13). Such a claim involves assumptions about the anti-Catholic attitudes of the Gothic readership that need to be questioned:³ yet Hoeveler speaks unhesitatingly of the “rabid anti-Catholicism” of Radcliffe’s culture (p.104). According to Geary the nature of this “rabid” anti-papism was Augustan “aversion...to the supposed mystifications of Catholics” (p.103) ossified by the “genuinely rationalistic currents” of the later century. Political concerns kept it burning bright, as Sage has claimed; although the threat of a Jacobite uprising was long dead by the time the Gothic novel reached the peak of its popularity, Catholic Relief and the impetus towards full Emancipation for Catholics constituted for most Englishmen an equally sizeable threat to the *status quo*. According to literary scholarship then, the tremendous force of the era’s anti-Catholicism seems undisputable.

Despite Sage’s interest in Radcliffe as the embodiment of English/Protestant unease, it is only Maturin who overtly propagandized a deep-rooted prejudice against Roman

¹ Victor Sage, introduction, *The Gothick Novel, A Casebook* (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1990), p.16.

² Gamer argues that wartime patriotism also played a large part in anti-Catholic feeling. He claims that audiences after the declaration of war with France found “perfectly palatable” the dualisms “good versus evil, truth versus falsehood, Protestant versus Catholic” (p.153). For an in-depth discussion of anti-Catholicism in England in the eighteenth century see Colin Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England, c. 1714-80 : a political and social study* (Manchester: New York: Manchester University Press, 1993).

³As Clara Tuite demonstrates in “Cloistered Closets: Enlightenment Pornography, The Confessional State, Homosexual Persecution and *The Monk*”, *Romanticism on the Net*. 8 (November, 1997), <<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat0385/closet.html>>

Catholicism.¹ Maturin had serious political and partisan intentions, unlike either Radcliffe or Lewis. For many critics, the tone Lewis cultivates in *The Monk* belies the assumption that he was seriously engaging anti-Catholic polemics. His anti-clericalism has been termed “casual” (Watt, p.93), “almost ritual” (Sage, *Horror Fiction*, p.14), and “routine and complacent” (Robert Geary, p.65). The burning of the convent at the end of the novel seems to undermine Lewis’ earlier anti-Catholic flourishes: when Lorenzo’s wished-for opportunity “to free [Madrid’s inhabitants] from their monkish fetters” occurs, “the result is not enlightenment but an orgy of indiscriminate violence” (Geary, p.67). The obvious explanation of this episode is that the reign of ‘superstition’ seemed to be keeping a worse barbarism in check. Naturally, scholars have read in this scene a reference to the storming of the Bastille and the consequent bloodshed of the French Revolution.² Lewis’ style has been convincingly interpreted as an emboldened example of the type of dilettantish, swaggering style personified and given currency by Walpole: a particular form of “cultural dissent” that was, Sage argues, “more theatrical, more *épatant* perhaps, than strictly political (p.14).” This reading of Lewis is compelling given the flamboyance of his person, his age, and evidence of his having written the novel out of boredom.³

“Épatant” or not, however, there is anti-Catholic comment in the novel. In his analysis of some of the literary terms that were common to the early romantic period, Martin Priestman locates for us an important ambiguity inherent in the vocabulary used by eighteenth-century writers to attack Catholicism: “Priestcraft and superstition were often yoked together as things the speaker expects every reasonable person to be opposed to...The beauty of these two extremely prevalent words was that it was impossible to tell exactly where the attack stopped: at Catholicism alone, or at any form of imposed ‘state religion’, including the Church of England, or even at Christianity itself?”⁴ This observation is crucial to my study. My findings in these chapters point clearly to the fact that in eighteenth-century

¹ Maturin fought against Catholic Emancipation in 1824 with a series of sermons, published as pamphlets. A staunch Calvinist, his extremism prevented him from promotion within the Anglican Church (he remained curate of St. Peter’s in Dublin for nearly twenty years). Catholicism in *Melmoth*, critics have agreed, is represented from an ultra-protestant point of view: the institutions of the Catholic Church are depicted as nothing more than “a cover for power, hypocrisy, and assassination” (David S. Miall, *Maturin, Melmoth the Wanderer, 1820* (October 2000)

<http://www.ualberta.ca/~dmiall/Gothic/Maturin.htm>) See also Summers, p.193. Tompkins describes the novel as “a belated work of the reformation, a roar of outrage against the bigotry, superstition, sadism, and hypocrisy which had infested the Roman Church” (p.189).

² See Watt, pp.12-42. As it is not the aim of this thesis to go over too much old ground, I will simply direct the reader to Ronald Paulson’s seminal reading in *Representations of Revolution 1789-1820* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp.218– 24.

³ John Berryman, introduction, Grove Press Edition of *The Monk*, p.19

⁴ Martin Priestman, *Romantic Atheism: Poetry & Freethought, 1780-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Date, 2000), p.10.

literature a Catholic might ‘stand for’ all orthodox and ‘enthusiastic’ Christians. We must be prepared to accept therefore that in social and political discourse the same rule might apply. The climate in the late century was one in which radical opinions could be represented as disloyalty, and conservative opinions represented as loyalty, with absolute ease. Thus, despite some later questioning of the sincerity of Lewis’ position in *The Monk*, the *European Magazine* at the time read the novel as seditious: conveying an “oblique attack” upon all “venerable establishments”.¹ In the troubled 1790s, any published display or disclosure of intolerance towards orthodox Christians, no matter how “épatant”, was enough to attract accusations of Jacobinism. It is worth noting the similarity of conditions in the 1820s - which were “as turbulent as the 1790s” Sage argues, with “pamphleteering for and against the cause of Catholic Emancipation ...exacerbated by the threat of invasion from Europe through Ireland” (*Horror Fiction*, p.35) – which made it possible for Maturin’s attack on Catholicism in *Melmoth* to be construed as nothing less than anarchic.²

Thus certain Gothic novels were associated with anti-Church polemics from their first reception, and their focus has served to form a picture of the Gothic mode in its entirety as transgressive in its attitudes towards Christianity. That Gothic writers were either “zealous reformation patriots” (Sage, *Gothick Novel*, p.16) (Radcliffe, Maturin, Clara Reeve) or “followers of Voltaire” (Lewis, Walpole, Beckford), or both, is a critical given (Fiedler, p.137). The religious opinions of the former type, critics claim, are expressed through anti-Catholicism, forms of Deism and ‘natural’ Christian virtue liberated from organized religion,³ and (particularly in the case of Reeve and Radcliffe) the providential motif that was widespread in the English novel by the late eighteenth century.⁴ The convictions of the latter, by contrast, are seen as the ideological offspring of what the *European Magazine* called ‘democratic atheism’. Critics argue that Lewis, Walpole and Beckford use supernatural

¹ See Howard Chapter 5 pp.183-238 for a discussion of the novel’s “wide reception as morally and politically subversive” (p.9). Notably, *The Monk* was reviewed sympathetically by the *Analytical Review*, a paper “regarded in Government circles as a dangerous nest of Jacobins, feminists and radicals” (Sage, p.14).

² In 1821 Maturin’s attacks on monasticism and papism was read as “taunts against religion” and laid him open to charges of subversion. The *London Magazine*’s criticism of *Melmoth* runs: “the taunts against religion are too keen, the invectives against society too terrible, the spirit of malignant discontent against the order of things established, is too subtle, too ascetic, and too sustained, to be quite affected; and though we believe that this author, both in his heart and in his life, contradicts such doctrines, he may rest assured that the eloquence with which he enables his devils to enforce them must offend, though it cannot do harm, the virtuous; and may, perhaps, but too fatally, mislead many who are as yet hesitating upon the Rubicon of crime” (*London Magazine* 3, May, 1821, p.518). Tompkins notices a “good deal of republican spirit in Maturin’s novel...a genuine dislike for authoritarian political systems, especially as they are linked with religious tyranny, and an insistence upon the right of the individual to determine his destiny upon earth as well as to make his appeals to God without priestly interference” (p.189-190).

³ See Maturin’s character Imalee.

⁴ See Geary, p.58.

elements to create a totally desacralized state. Whereas Radcliffe offers a form of ‘tasteful’ metaphysics, within a “credible context”,¹ Lewis *et al* initiate wanton chaos. What many critics see in the Gothic is a distorted religious iconography. In these readings, Christian emblems are not only emptied of all traditional meaning but are also filled with demonic significance. They become the symbols of “a religious and social order now morally transformed”² and signify only the horror of corruption and tyranny. Critics such as Alok Bhalla make an impassioned case for Gothic’s desacralized, “desacralizing” energy:

The Gothic novel borrows its images from medieval religious traditions to articulate the Self’s sense of dislocation and rupture from a sacred past and its consequent inability to discover a morally or spiritually viable community. ...Metaphors borrowed from the Christian tradition are used..not to celebrate sacred dramas ending in mystical ecstasy, but to enact and elaborate demonic rituals which promise no atonement of guilt and no symbolic reiteration of cosmogony....The Gothic novelist employs religious vocabulary... only to acknowledge the “sanguinary and sensual abomination” of the social or historical world in which he lives.³

Bhalla argues that in its quest to “articulate the Self’s sense of dislocation and rupture from a sacred past”, to acknowledge the “sanguinary abomination” of its present, Gothic shocks, mocks and shakes faith in institutionalized Christianity. At one level it does so by continuing the Deistic tradition of sensibility (this, despite the fact that Gothic writers take part in a discourse supporting the principles of reason and rational control over sensibility, to suit the times⁴) and by positioning the narrative’s supernatural elements within the “credible context” of special providences “working mostly through second or natural causes” (Geary, p.35). At its most extreme Gothic is seen “to enact and elaborate demonic rituals” which promise only “more madness, agony and disintegration” (Bhalla, p.72). Some critics imply that Gothic’s transgression represents a genuine expression of spiritual crisis.⁵ Although Clara Reeve’s alleged “counter-Gothick” (Sage, p13) indicates to some critics the existence of a

¹ Geary, p.35; see also Blakemore and Alok Bhalla, *The Cartographers of Hell: essays on the Gothic novel and the social history of England* (New Delhi: Sterling; New York: APT Books, 1991).

² Frederick S. Frank, “Gothic Gold: the Sadleir-Black Collection of Gothic Fiction”, *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* Vol. 26, 1998, 1998 <<http://www.lib.virginia.edu/speccol/collections/sadleir-black/goldapx.html>>

³ Bhalla, ps. 72, 81. See also Geary, Chapter 4, pp.59-81.

⁴ Sensibility had fallen out of favour by the 1780s and many Gothic novels of the following decades reflect this. Radcliffe’s heroines, for example, are always being warned of the dangers of indulging their feelings too much. The necessity for the bourgeois code to be reassessed became even more pressing in the 1790s: the sanguinity of the French Revolution radically undermined notions of man’s innate goodness and the healthiness of allowing ‘natural’ feelings to go unchecked and unregulated. See Janet Todd, *Sensibility – An Introduction*, (London & New York, Methuen, 1986), especially p.190.

⁵ Joel Porte, “In the Hands of an Angry God: Religious Terror in Gothic Fiction,” *The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism* (Washington State University Press, 1974), pp.42-64.

conservative Gothic,¹ scholars on the whole would think it foolish to claim that such conservatism includes the Gothic representation of Christianity. Such criticism thus presupposes the readers of Gothic to have Whiggish, ‘modern’ tastes where religion is concerned: a readership of no coherent belief for whom “an excess of rationalism [had drained] religion of vitality” (Geary, p.19). They turned to the Gothic novel for a “pleasing shiver”, for a sense of “primitive dread” without the “inherited doctrinal context” of supernatural belief, and without credulity (p.21).

In this survey of the prevailing critical attitude towards Catholicism in the Gothic, I have begun to imply that many critics have worked on the prescription of Gothic anti-Catholicism without analyzing the complexity of its representations. The aim of this thesis is to prove that this is the case. Assumptions have been made about the entire genre’s religious bias based on only a handful of works, which I suggest renders unstable scholarship’s analysis. I also suggest that the popular critical reading of anti-Catholicism and religious subversiveness in the Gothic is the result of both oversimplification and presupposition on the part of scholars: a symptom of what Barbara Darby calls the “late-twentieth-century desire for subtlety or sedition”. Such bias has precluded a detailed study of Gothic’s treatment of religion. The ‘fact’ of Gothic’s anti-Catholicism remains uncontested. My aim in this thesis is to challenge that orthodoxy.

II

This thesis takes several different approaches to challenging the anti-Catholic orthodoxy of literary criticism. The motivating factor behind the urge to challenge this orthodoxy is my discovery of the existence of several Gothic novels written during the period 1790-1812 that complicate critical assumptions about Gothic’s position on Catholicism and Christianity. These novels are Gothic in the sense that they are set in Catholic Europe, they feature monastic or religious environments, and they display a great many other Gothic conventions, except one: their attitude towards their Catholic materials is unequivocally positive. Little or no evidence remains of the personal lives and religious leanings of these writers; in particular we do not know whether or not these authors were themselves Catholic. However, this thesis aims not to limit its study to biographical detail, but rather to seek to uncover and analyse the

¹ See also Geary, p.40, Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: New York: Methuen, 1981), Summers, Watt and David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: a History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (London: New York: Longmans, 1979).

historical circumstances that may have made such sympathetic portrayals of Catholics and Catholicism possible.

My analysis begins in the period during which the literary Gothic rose to the height of its popularity. In the 1790s, I argue, the religious sympathies of the middle and upper classes were greatly influenced by the conservative Whig agenda of Burke. This agenda, as James Sack argues, involved “the revival and nurture..of right-wing political and especially spiritual attitudes in the press, in pamphlets, and in sermons” .¹ It was an agenda which “would have been considered largely Toryish before 1760”, as Sack notes (p.49): indeed Burke himself in the 1790s seemed resigned to his principles being perceived as more Tory than Whig.² In the hugely popular *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Burke claims that “religion is the basis of civil society and the source of all good and of all comfort”.³ In this, Burke shared the views of popular Christian Evangelical campaigners for moral reform like Hannah More and William Wilberforce, passionate supporters of reform projects which since the 1780s had been labouring to create the social and institutional framework within which a more moral and virtuous society might take shape.⁴ The period’s interest in chivalry, and its urgent backlash against sensibility,⁵ can be seen as feeding directly into this gathering force of dogmatic, conservative Christian moral discourse.

In *Reflections* Burke praises his country’s historic resistance to indiscriminate revision and innovation within its ecclesiastical and theological structures. The fatal error of the French Revolution, according to him, was not the revolt itself but the way in which the revolt unlike all previous revolutions and reforms abandoned and denied all sense of the nation’s past, in particular its religious past. In Burke’s counterrevolutionary writings, argues Conor Cruise O’Brien, his argument “addressed to the nobility and gentry of England, seeks to persuade these classes that their interests are bound up with Catholicism in Europe, that Catholicism is a bastion of order while Protestantism in its militantly anti-Catholic forms--the

¹ James J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative, Reaction and Orthodoxy in Britain, c. 1760-1832* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), p.49.

² See Sack quoting from Burke’s own papers (footnote 13, p.66). Sack sees Toryism in the late eighteenth century as a political bias involved more than anything else with the preservation of religion and the Church (p.50).

³ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event. In a Letter Intended to Have Been Sent to a Gentleman in Paris*, 1790 (Ontario: Batoche Books, 2000), p.75. All quotations are taken from this edition.

⁴ Indeed Wilberforce’s *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes, Contrasted with Real Christianity* (1797) was the second most influential book amongst the upper and middle classes after Burke’s *Reflections*. *A Practical View* urged, as a matter of national salvation, a return to vital, orthodox Christianity: “Everyone talked of it, everyone was attracted by its eloquence, everyone admitted the benevolence and talents and sincerity of the author” (introduction, *A Practical View* by William Wilberforce (New York, 1830) p.18-19).

⁵ See Todd, p.190.

Protestantism of the Dissenters and their sympathisers--is the natural seed-bed of Jacobinism".¹ Certainly Burke cultivates a position which goes some way to support this reading.² According to O'Brien, a "Jacobite manner" clearly emerges in *Reflections* and it is one by which Burke's readership would have been moved. In particular, O'Brien alludes to Burke's "Gothic... pathetic" lamentation of Marie Antoinette, when he claims that "the age of chivalry is gone" (*Reflections*, p.60). The reference to chivalry is significant, as O'Brien argues:

Once the essentials of the status quo were so magisterially defined and defended, the hint of the Jacobite in the background must have been pleasing rather than obnoxious. It shed something of the pathos and glamour of a lost cause on a cause which those to whom Burke appealed were determined should not be lost at all. At the same time, acceptance of that pathos and glamour did something to rehabilitate the most irremediably lost of British causes. Roman Catholicism develops the appeal of the romantic, at a time when such an appeal was beginning to be socially relevant (p.42).

The magisterial nature of the status quo being thus defined, O'Brien's belief is that the religion of that status quo – Catholicism – was accepted as both glamorous and pathetic. This claim is hugely important to this study. My thesis upholds the argument that Roman Catholicism was being rehabilitated and romanticized during the 1790s.

Chapter 1 will describe this rehabilitation which was both ideological and material in nature. The social relevancy of Catholicism's supposed romantic appeal can be seen in the decade's Catholic Relief legislation and in England's reception of the persecuted French clergy and the consequent settlement of many Catholic religious émigré communities in England. The *Gentleman's Magazine* of this period records public and political displays of pro-Catholic sympathy - often 'romantic' in tone, as I will show - religious toleration, and describes the Church of England's pressing need for a consensus of orthodoxy in religious matters in the face of Jacobinism and fashionable unbelief. This chapter undertakes to challenge previous criticism by arguing that an atmosphere of pro-Catholic sympathy

¹ Conor Cruise O'Brien, introduction, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* by Edmund Burke, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p.38.

² The political themes that preoccupy Burke in the *Reflections* are embodied in his attack upon Lord Gordon, imprisoned at this time for leading the Gordon Riots in 1780. Burke heaps scorn upon him for his anti-Catholic, anti-ecclesiastic zeal (Burke was a famous supporter of Catholic Relief), for embracing the values of the mob, for libeling Marie Antoinette and for converting to Judaism and thus making light of an "antient religion" (not to mention disgracing it by his conduct). Burke ends his attack by requesting the French recipient of his letter to "Send us your popish Archbishop of Paris, and we will send you our protestant Rabbin" (p.70).

permeated the troubled Revolutionary decade in England and produced tangible results for the regrowth of Roman Catholicism in England.

Chapter 2 highlights sentimental and romanticized representations of ‘papism’ in the literature and culture from which the Gothic novel emerged and established itself; and suggests that cultural and literary approaches to Catholicism in the eighteenth century are more ambiguous than the interpretations of Gothic’s critics have led us to believe. Before 1790, the culture of Catholicism in England was marked, as Tuite says, “by a kind of antiquarian charge, and occupied the status of a curiosity as an object of connoisseurship and a kind of accoutrement”. Perhaps the most famous appropriator of Catholic materials and style was Horace Walpole. For Walpole, as for William Beckford, Catholicism worked upon the romantic side of the religious imagination.¹ This chapter shows that Walpole and Beckford were not the first writers to see Catholicism thus, and continues by arguing the importance of the sentimental appropriation of Catholicism. The Roman Church’s devotional ‘romance’, its liturgical and architectural flamboyance, inspired visions and dreams of an older order when society had a Godward purpose and direction. In the mid eighteenth century, this was manifested in an interest amongst scholars, antiquarians and writers in medievalism and the idea of a society based around the chief chivalric virtues of piety, honour, valour, courtesy, chastity and loyalty. As Britain’s nationalism became channelled along religious and class lines following the conservatism of Burke, George III and Pitt however, the ideological possibilities of this older order became increasingly important. ‘Chivalric’ definitions of manhood and treatises outlining a redefinition of femininity along strongly conservative lines were written and promoted by moral theorists such as Thomas Gisborne and Hannah More. And Gothic became the most popular style of architecture in the country, appropriated in the decades succeeding the French Revolution as the leading civic and royal architectural style and the official architectural style of the Established Church.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 challenge the orthodoxy of established opinion about the role of Catholicism in the Gothic novel. Through his use of the cloister theme in *The Monk* I suggest that Lewis was attempting to win the approval of an orthodox audience – an audience, I argue, with conservative sympathies. This audience was caught up in the general wave of sentiment for orthodox forms of Christianity. Orthodoxy’s symbolic embodiment in England’s medieval, monastic past meant that representations of that past could be seen as

¹“The priests...exhausted their knowledge of the passions in composing edifices whose pomp, mechanism, vaults, tombs, painted windows, gloom, and perspectives infused such sensations of romantic devotion...In Westminster Abbey, one thinks not of the builder; the religion of the place makes the first impression”, Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting* (London, 1879), p.70.

supporting the conservative ideals of order and stability. In *The Italian* (1796) – Radcliffe’s famous ‘answer’ to Lewis – I suggest that Radcliffe, too, is attempting to court a readership with popular conservative opinions, rather than appeal to a Whiggish, free-thinking audience, as scholarship has suggested. In Chapters 4 and 5, I introduce and analyse several Gothic novels that will be new to scholarship. Their position on Catholicism problematizes our accepted reading of Gothic’s attitude to Catholics in particular and religion in general. I will argue that the authors use Catholic materials to elevate the virtues of orthodoxy and piety in Christian belief. The novels demonstrate, through the use of monastic or monkish characters, the necessity and value of piety. Therefore we have Catholic characters displaying heroic qualities in narratives depicting the superior advantages of pious Christian conduct, or religious enthusiasm, over ‘worldly’ sensibility.

My study of the novels begins with Eleanor Sleath’s *The Orphan of the Rhine* (1798) which depicts conventualism in a strongly romantic light and concludes with Louisa Sidney Stanhope’s portrayal of heroic monks and a hero who would be a monk in *The Confessional of Valombre* (1812). My reading of the texts in Chapter 4 focuses on the figure of the nun and presupposes the existence of a ‘female gothic’: in other words Chapter 4 engages the critical school of thought that considers Gothic novels written by women in which the heroine is pursued and persecuted by a villainous male to be highlighting gender difference and oppression. Gothic’s “suffering” nuns (as termed by John Garrett)¹ are usually discussed in terms of Gothic’s preoccupation with the strategies of victimization and oppression practised by the Catholic Church. In the narratives discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 however, the convent signifies neither oppression nor tyranny, but the rewards of dedication to a cloistered Christian life. The Catholic heroine, forced by circumstance to quit the patriarchal marriage market-place finds in the convent a space where self-command, self-possession and fulfilment is achieved through religious devotion. Chapter 4 discusses the role of the nun as heroine in these novels and assesses the didactic purpose of that character for Gothic’s female readers. Chapter 5 comprises a reading of some more little-known texts in which the nobleman turned humble monk - representing the refined man of sensibility armed with religious devotion - and the young hero with the heart of a monk are pivotal figures. These novels turn on central didactic themes of sensibility (or love) subordinated to Christian duty and/or the sanctity and importance of pious virtues in everyday life. My reading discusses these texts in terms of the narrative of spiritual chivalry and its significance for the period.

¹ John Garrett, *Gothic Strains and Bourgeois Sentiments in the Novels of Mrs. Ann Radcliffe and her Imitators* (New York, Arno Press, 1980), p.110.

I agree with Sage that the Gothic “is not a dusty corner but an arena open, from the first, to the social and political interests of the day” (*Gothick Novel*, p.8); and that, as Howard says, “it must have been difficult for readers and writers of the 1790s to engage with literature independently of an awareness of contemporary... ideologies” (p.110). My hypothesis is that the novels in this thesis engage with the patriotic and counterrevolutionary promotion amongst Church and King factions of the superior value of orthodoxy and tradition in matters of faith; and that they reflect the awareness amongst these factions of Catholics as associates in that precious orthodoxy. No reflection or engagement of such a discourse in the Gothic has been recognized by previous scholarship. And to include such a discourse in our picture of the Gothic will require an adjustment of our perspective on the canonical novels as well.

CHAPTER 1

“A compliment to be called Papist”? :

English Toleration of Catholicism in the Later Eighteenth Century

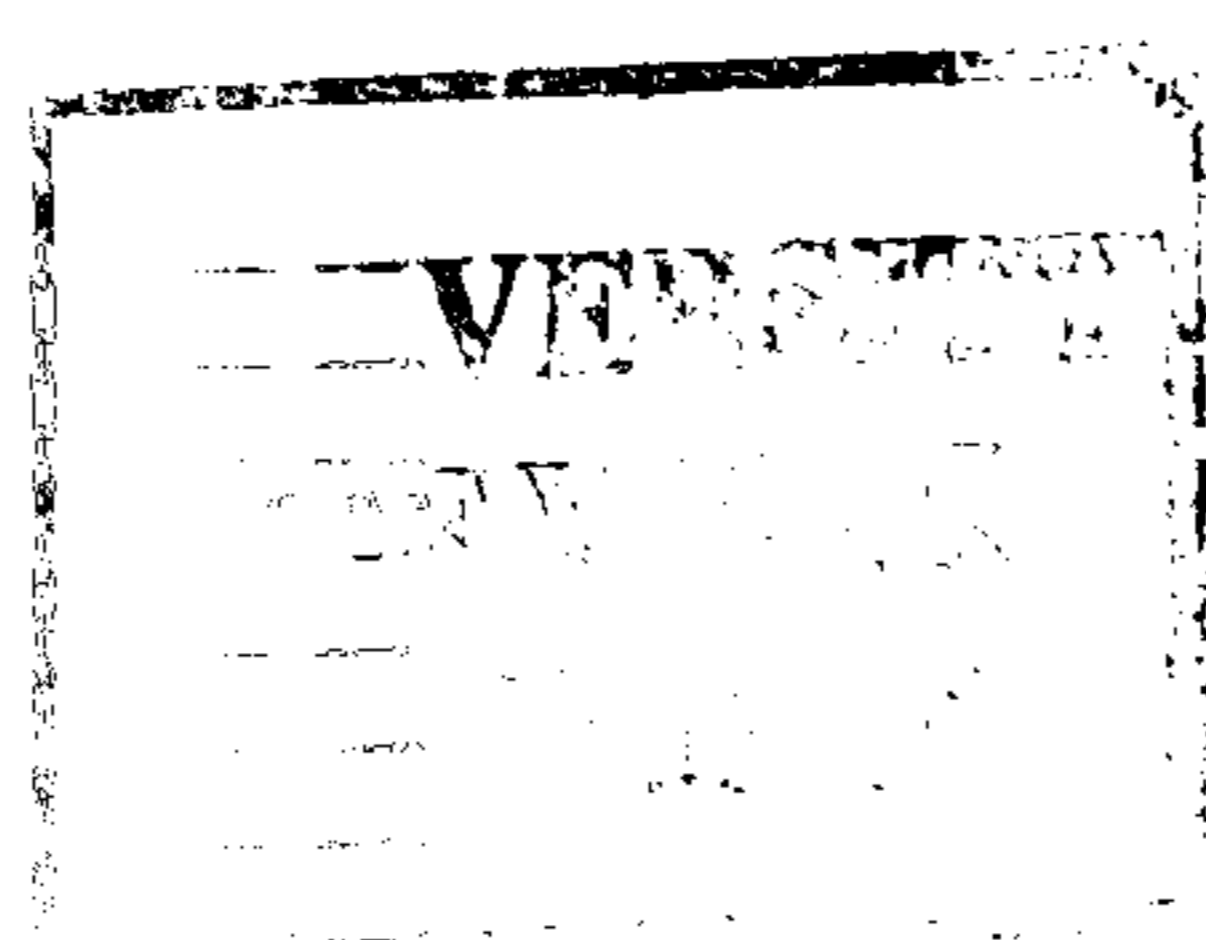
“If abhorrence of atheism implies Popery, reckon it a compliment to be called Papist”
Horace Walpole, letter to Hannah More, Oct. 1793.¹

My discovery of a number of Gothic novels from 1790 to 1816 which portray Catholic religious and Catholic forms of devotion in a strongly sympathetic and sentimental light, led me to analyse the events and discourses of that period in order to explore what might have made these representations possible.

Some historians argue that sympathy for the French émigré clergy during the 1790s undoubtedly helped the Catholic cause in England.² This argument suggested to me that attitudes towards Catholics must have changed to a certain extent during this time. I decided to use the *Gentleman's Magazine* as a case study in ascertaining attitudes towards the French clergy and religious, and consequently towards Catholics and Catholicism in general, during the period of the French Revolution. Under John Nichols, printer and antiquarian, the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1731-1907) became one of the most influential periodicals in Britain. The most widely read of the journals, it published material and letters on all subjects and from all quarters. *The Gentleman's Magazine* reflected and no doubt influenced the shape and direction of current ideas and sentiments. It also had a wide authorship, including many great literary figures of the day, and the literary content and the reviews section alone make it possible to suppose that authors of Gothic fiction would have been included in the magazine's readership. These factors make it well suited for a 'case study' of public attitudes towards Catholicism during the 1790s, the period when the popularity of the Gothic novel

¹Horace Walpole, “To Miss Hannah More. Strawberry Hill, Oct 1793”, *The Letters of Horace Walpole, Earl of Orford* (London, 1840), Vol. 6, p 496-497. Further references to the correspondence of Walpole are to this edition.

² See G.M. Ditchfield, “‘Incompatible with the very name of Christian’: English Catholics and Unitarians in the Age of Milner”, *Recusant History*, Vol. 5 (2000): pp. 50-73. Also Tony Hadland, *Thames Valley Papists: From Reformation to Emancipation 1534-1829*, 2001 <[http:// www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~hadland/tvp/ tvpcontents.html](http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~hadland/tvp/tvpcontents.html)>



was at its highest (a longer case study of this nature would want to extend analysis of the *Gentleman's Magazine* right up to 1829 and Catholic Emancipation but this thesis is restricted by space and time limitations to a modest timeframe).

In this chapter I argue that the emergence of a climate of sympathy towards Catholics in the late eighteenth century was nurtured out of a prolonged and increased awareness amongst Church and King factions of the relevance of religious toleration. But mainly it was a consequence of sympathy for the French émigré clergy whose cause Edmund Burke and others encouraged Anglicans to see as the cause of all churches. Significantly in England, I will show, Catholicism came in a sense to evoke the vulnerable position of the entire Christian Church. During the Revolution when the French clergy were persecuted at first for recusancy, and then in the process of dechristianization, they (the French clergy) came to symbolize Christianity itself, under attack from Jacobinism and fashionable scepticism. I suggest that the development of a discourse synthesizing the cause of the Catholic Church with that of Christianity itself led to a rehabilitation of the reputation of Catholicism and the infrastructural rehabilitation of the Catholic Church in England during the revolutionary years.

However as the clearest official signposts of increasing sympathy are the Catholic Relief Bills it is with an assessment of the measure of Catholic sympathy evident in 1778 when the first Catholic Relief Bill was passed that this Chapter starts. The first Catholic Relief Bill put a formal end to the prosecution of Catholic priests by informers and enabled Catholics who took a new oath denouncing Stuart claims to the throne and denying the civil jurisdiction of the Pope, to purchase and inherit land legally. Catholics educated in Catholic schools on the continent were no longer deprived of their property. The bill was, argues Paul Langford, a consequence of “eighteenth-century hard-headedness and sentiment”.¹ F.C. Mather argues that the decline of Jacobitism was the most significant contributing factor to the relaxation of the Penal Laws: that, and the proof of the loyalty of Catholic troops in the War of American Independence.² Whether or not these events were significant causes, or

¹ Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford: OUP, 1989), p.550. Langford claims “it was a matter of commonplace observation that the laws [against Catholics] were rarely executed” - indeed in Lancashire, where papists were numerous “they enjoyed relative immunity” (p.294). In 1733 the Archbishop of York told Lord Carlisle that Catholics who lived peaceably “will find the Penal Act, for my part, as harmless as they can wish”; cited in Leo Gooch, “ ‘The Religion for a Gentleman’: The Northern Catholic Gentry in the Eighteenth Century”, *Recusant History*, Vol. 23, 4: pp.543-567, p.344.

² F.C. Mather, *High Church Prophet: Bishop Samuel Horsley (1733-1806) and the Caroline Tradition in the Later Georgian Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p.92.

whether simply tolerance at a local level helped to aid the relaxation,¹ by 1778 the mainstays of the laws against papists “constituted an embarrassment to enlightened opinion” (Langford, p.550). Langford quotes John Dunning (1731-83), who stated that the law which prevented Catholics from acquiring real property by purchase had “only to be mentioned to excite the indignation of the House” (Langford, p.550). Sack also notes the enlightened indignation aroused by the continuing existence of the penal laws (p.225).

The 1778 bill, however, sparked the Gordon Riots: the infamous anti-Catholic reaction by a furious mob which brought London to its knees. Sage claimed that the Gordon Riots were a true indication of national feeling, and set the cause of religious – and especially Catholic – toleration back by decades, a claim which has not been contested by literary critics. But Langford argues that rather than changing the atmosphere of toleration completely the strength of feeling that fuelled the violence of the Gordon Riots “was difficult for contemporaries to explain, let alone excuse” (p.551). The riots began with attacks on prominent papists and their chapels and libraries. The rioters soon became less discriminating however. In scenes prophetic of the French Revolution, thousands of the poor – men, women and children - marched with blue cockades in their hats plundering breweries, burning and ransacking buildings, freeing prisoners from the gaols and besieging the Bank of England. Two hundred and eighty-five people died and twenty-one were executed. F.C. Mather claims that “the Gordon Riots were wholly untypical, resulting more from social tensions in an overcrowded metropolis than from hatred of the Pope’s religion” (p.90). Horace Walpole noted of the riots that “negligence was certainly its nurse, and religion only its godmother.”² In the following year, the *Morning Herald* “the leading daily newspaper of George III and Lord North” (Sack, p.226-227), was still favouring relaxing the Catholic penal laws, and even urging that they be strictly enforced against Presbyterians.³ Such sentiments seem at odds with Sage’s account of the riots’ reversal of the tide of toleration for Catholics, particularly as

¹ Catholics were protected almost by tradition, Langford argues: “Even at times of tension, for example during the Jacobite Rebellions of 1715 and 1745, local communities and their leaders tended to protect Catholic families with whom they lived on amicable, if slightly distant, terms”. Ditchfield notes the extent of Catholic assimilation, especially at the gentry level, and of personal and intellectual relationships between Catholic and Protestant neighbours.

² Letter to the Rev. Mr. Cole, June 15, 1780 (*Letters*, Vol.6, p.89-90). An eye-witness to the riots, Ignatius Sancho declared “there is more at the bottom of this business than merely the repeal of an act which has as yet produced no bad consequences, and perhaps never might” (Ignatius Sancho, Letter to John Spink June 6, 1780 in *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho: An African, to which are Prefixed, Memoirs of his Life* [London: 1782]).

³ *Morning Herald*, March 24 and September 8, 1781.

there is much evidence to suggest that there was a national positive interest shown in the activities of groups promoting the English Catholic cause in the 1780s.¹

However it was the 1790s that, as Sack says, became “the *anni mirabili* of .. pro-catholic...sentiments” (p.227). The three chief leaders of conservative opinion Burke, Pitt, and George III were “either strongly pro-Catholic or silent on the matter” (Sack, p.239). At the start of the decade in 1791 came a second more extensive and far-reaching Catholic Relief Act which re-admitted Catholics to the professions, although they were still barred from certain universities (Oxford, for example). Registered Catholic places of worship were legalised, provided that the officiating priests took the oath of allegiance. After the legislation was passed, as Sack shows, “the clerically oriented press and the government-sponsored press [were] extremely tolerant of Catholics”, demonstrating support for further concessions for Catholics in their drive for Emancipation, and for the position of Irish Catholics (Sack, p.230), until the end of the century.

The main cause of increased relief and toleration in the 1790s was the French Revolution. The persecution of the Catholic clergy in France and the consequent dechristianization of the nation drove thousands of recusant priests and a few hundred monastics to English shores, where they were charitably received. Ward claims that one great inducement to their seeking asylum in England were the opinions expressed in Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.² Burke’s views on the necessity for the success of a nation of stability, tradition and orthodoxy in spiritual matters, his conservative, almost Toryish insistence on the preservation of religion and the Church, had a resounding impact on public opinion. By means of this letter “intended to have been sent to a gentleman in Paris, 1790”, Burke encouraged the Church and King factions to see the persecution not just as the cause of French Catholicism, but as the cause of Christianity itself, besieged by Jacobinism and a modish impiety and secularity. As Robert Ryan says, “Burke did his best to turn the debate on the French Revolution into a religious argument. He was astute enough to sense very early on what historians now see clearly, that the Revolution’s most serious tactical error

¹ In the years following the Gordon Riots, a group of English Catholic writers associated with the Cisalpine Club published several Catholic apologetics “partly aimed at convincing Protestants of the justice of Emancipation and partly directed at debate within their own Church” (R.J.Smith, “Cobbett, Catholic History, and the Middle Ages” in *Studies in Medievalism*, vol. 4, pp.113-142, p.115). Geoffrey Scott, claiming that the ‘cause’ of English Catholicism “explodes” during the Cisalpine period, asserts “Cisalpinism created a frenzy of high-profile publication and writing, with English Catholics taking center stage and being looked at kindly by the establishment” (Geoffrey Scott, “Dom Joseph Cuthbert Wilkes (1748-1829) and English Benedictine Involvement in the Cisalpine Stir”, *Recusant History*, vol. 23, No. 3, May 1997, pp.316-337, p.336).

² Bernard Ward, *The Dawn of the Catholic Revival in England, 1781-1803*, (London, New York: Longmans, Green, 1909), Vol. II, p.165.

was its attack on the Catholic Church....the strategy was successful; religion became an increasingly important factor in the revolutionary debate, one that grew in significance as the prevailing revolutionary ideology in France became more militantly anti-Christian.”¹

The conservatism of Burke, Pitt and George III formed itself around the values of an age shaped by “the social structure of feudalism, when kingship was revered and the Church at its most powerful.”² Burke characterizes both himself and the English as strongly attached to their religion (“our church establishment...is first and last and midst in our minds.” p.76) and ascribes the nation’s political and social equanimity to the adherence to and preservation of the precious legacies of the pre-reformed Church:

So tenacious are we of the old ecclesiastical modes and fashions of institution that very little alteration has been made in them since the fourteenth or fifteenth century; adhering in this particular, as in all things else, to our old settled maxim, never entirely nor at once to depart from antiquity. We found these old institutions, on the whole, favorable to morality and discipline, and we thought they were susceptible of amendment without altering the ground. We thought that they were capable of receiving and meliorating, and above all of preserving, the accessions of science and literature, as the order of Providence should successively produce them. And after all, with this Gothic and monkish education (for such it is in the groundwork) we may put in our claim to as ample and as early a share in all the improvements in science, in arts, and in literature which have illuminated and adorned the modern world, as any other nation in Europe (p.83).

The thinking behind this passage is shaped by the deepening approval for the medieval world brought by the swelling Gothic Revival. Evocation of the Gothic world produced an antidotal (in troubled times) and romantic vision of an England whose national character was strongly marked by religious devotion, and loyalty to God’s chosen monarch. In this narrative, Burke contributes to that evocative image by favourably appraising the contributions, both in terms of constitutional and social order (“morality and discipline”), and the aesthetics of the medieval Catholic Church. His strategy then is to propagandize England’s religion as an unbroken tradition (“So tenacious are we of the old ecclesiastical modes and fashions of institution that very little alteration has been made in them since the fourteenth or fifteenth century”): a strategy that feeds directly into the Church of England’s desire to play down its reforming past.

¹ Robert Ryan, *The Romantic Reformation: Religious Politics in English Literature, 1789-1824* (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.23.

² Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p.23.

Burke and his contemporaries were at pains to exhibit to France a romantic representation of an England devoted to God and King. The Church of England was more keen than ever to distance itself from its radical dissenting branches and chivalric values, with their emphasis on adherence to the teachings of the Church and defending Church and country from the infidel, resonated for members of the upper and middle classes. The war with France, begun in 1793, represented the war against atheism and democracy, the defence of Church, State and monarchical authority: “The defence of everything dear to us as men and as Christians” writes one correspondent to the *Gentleman’s Magazine* in June 1793 (p.498). Thomas Gisborne, a good friend of William Wilberforce, wrote a treatise on the duties of the male sex which, in the tradition of chivalry, endeavoured “to establish moral duties on Christian principles, and to enforce the performance of them by Christian motives.”¹ His advice, for example, to a military officer is along chivalric lines: he should be aware that “above all things.. one of the highest duties which he owes to his Maker, and one of the most substantial benefits which he can render to his Country, is to train up the men under his authority to settled principles and habits of religion.” To men in all positions of authority the advice is the same.

As a result of Burke’s discourse, the discourse of enthusiasm for England’s Catholic (Gothic, monastic, chivalric) past and its impact on the present stability of the nation, and the ecclesiastical and political discourses into which it fed, pro-Catholic sentiment grew. The ancient charge that Dissenters were more dangerous to the Church establishment than Roman Catholics² was renewed with vigour, and Catholics found themselves in the unlikely position of being widely deemed brothers-in-orthodoxy with Anglicans.³ Moreover as I am about to show, there is evidence to suggest that the sufferings of the French clergy provoked

¹ Thomas Gisborne, *An enquiry into the duties of men in the higher and middle classes of society in Great Britain resulting from their respective stations, professions, and employments* (London, 1795), chapter 15, p.472.

² The writings of John Shebbeare the Tory apologist, particularly *Letters on the English Nation* (1755), demonstrate that a discourse favouring Catholics and demonizing Dissenters existed early in the century. Sack suspects that “anti-reformation feeling” was “deeply rooted in English history” (p.222).

³ Ditchfield shows how Unitarians became England’s religious and political outcasts, constituting a reversal of roles with the Catholics. From readings of the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, the case of the Dissenters in relation to the Catholics in the early 1790s seems fairly unambiguous. Catholics are “better Christians and better subjects” says one ‘G.G.’ in an epistolary invective against the followers of Price and Priestley (*Gentleman’s Magazine*, March 1792, p.223). A letter from A.M., a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge boldly states that despite the approbation Cambridge receives from the dissenting community, the undergraduates embrace Burke, whose “*Reflexions*” has met with “universal admiration...here” (*Gentleman’s Magazine*, September 1791, p.811). The same edition reports the Bishop of St. David’s speech to the House of Lords on the second reading of the Relief Bill, in which he claims that “the Roman Catholics better understand, than the thing seems to be understood by many of those who call themselves our Protestant brethren, in what plain characters the injunction of the unreserved submission of the individual, to the Government under which he is born, is written in the divine law of the Gospel” (p.826).

widespread pro-Catholic sympathy, and that the conduct of the recusant clerical and monastic communities did much to disarm prejudice. As a result of all these influences, English Catholics won the small victories described in the Relief Bills in their ongoing struggle for acceptance and equal rights that would culminate in full Emancipation in 1829.

That pro-Catholic sentiment endured as a direct response to the sufferings of the French clergy can be attested to both by well-known events and by reports in popular journals. When Burke addressed parliament in May 1791 and spoke in sympathy for the Roman Catholic recusant clergy in France, the House cheered in support (Ward, II, p.2) Sympathy for clerics such as Bishop Pol de Léon, who had refused to allow his cathedral to be used for civic celebrations and finally fled to England, was high in government and polite circles. Bishop Samuel Horsley asserted in 1792, “Men like the Bishop of Léon... present to the world an august and edifying spectacle.”¹ Soon the general public were reading and hearing of the ill treatment of French priests from newspapers, sermons, magazines and pamphlets.

“Letters from Paris, during the Summer of 1791” in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* is an example of the type of commentary that brought the plight of the French Church to the attention of the public in England during the years of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. The author reports that the Capuchin convent at Calais has been evacuated and the gardens rented by a citizen, whilst at St. Omer, the famous Jesuit College established in 1593 to provide a Catholic education for the children of English families, the courts are growing over with grass. The author does not feel that these humbling measures have been taken in the true spirit of reform: “The misery is, that the degradation is general, where the exaltation was only partial... They are all degraded, but they were not all preferred; for I must call it a degradation to have their lands taken from them, though they may be pensioned (sic), in return, with a few pounds more than their own impropriation might have produced.”² Clearly disapproving of religious sites being rented out for secular purposes the writer calls the “degradation” of the religious and clergy alike a “misery” (in other words the Gallican hierarchy was in need of reformation, but the shame is that all priests have been made to suffer), and the reviewer of these letters describes as “just” the observations “on the injustice of seizing the church-lands” (p.455). It is likely that such reports published in English journals early on in the Constitutional process sounded alarm bells in the national consciousness: certainly they can

¹ Cited in Mather, p.103.

² *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, May 1792, p.452.

only have contributed to the immediate sympathy that was expressed for the émigré clergy as the political situation worsened, and they fled to England.

After the fall of the French throne on 10th August 1792, a priest not taking a new civic oath requiring total identification with the revolutionary philosophy was forced to evacuate France or risk deportation to Guiana. A mass exodus of clergy to continental Europe and Britain followed. Hadland notes that “by September 1792 there were 1,500 French priests in England and in little more than a year the number rose to about 5,000”. Dominic Bellenger agrees with the eighteenth-century convert Henry Best who claimed in a *Sermon on Priestly Absolution* that in the early years of the exile there was a Catholic priest in nearly “every town in England”, and most of them were French.¹ In 1792 the *Annual Register* records that “the streets of London now swarm with them; and as many of them are in absolute distress, subscriptions have been opened by our benevolent countrymen for their relief” (cited in Ward, p.12). Reports in John Bell and Peter Stuart’s *Oracle* in September 1792 suggest a very definite fear of ‘contamination’ from lay French refugees (particularly the women), but also declares:

As to the nonjuring clergy, their case seems to deserve extraordinary compassion, as they are marked objects of democratic vengeance. What numbers of their order have suffered the most wanton insults, the most barbarous and ignominious deaths, without either trial, law, or justice.²

Although he thoroughly distrusts the non-religious French royalists, the author believes that the recusancy of the clergy is proof of their loyalty and trustworthiness:

Bred up and educated in the strictest allegiance to their sovereign, and the sacred observance of the Catholic faith, which, however differing from our own in some points, we are taught to look upon with charity and benevolence: they could not see their king degraded, nor join in breaking down those altars at which they had so long ministered...

I think it can hardly be supposed, that they who have suffered so severely for their adherence to their king, should come hither with a view to disseminate principles hostile to our constitution.

The piece ends with a word of warning: a wolf may lurk in the flock. But in general the tone and argument suggests that the arrival of the persecuted Catholic clergy generated sympathy

¹ Dominic Bellenger, “The English Catholics and the French Exiled Clergy”, *Recusant History*, Vol. 15, 6 (October 1981): p.439.

² *The Oracle*, Wednesday September 26th, 1792.

rather than “profound insecurity”.¹ A letter published in the *Gentleman’s Magazine Supplement for the year 1792* shows a notable transformation from the earlier “Letters from Paris, during the Summer of 1791” where the Gallican Church is described as exalting certain members of its community. The writer of this later piece argues the overall blamelessness of the French clergy: “It is an national act, and a reformation of the State is alleged as the cause of so many enormities. The greatest crime of these unhappy men is their innocence and helplessness. The outcry is raised that they are priests and they are hunted down like wild Indians” (p.1167). This impassioned “outcry” is followed by a self-congratulatory appeal for tolerance and charity, likening Britain to a loving Christian mother holding out her arms to those persecuted in the name of Christianity:

No person can perish for want in this Christian, this Protestant country. We shall lose the professions and the characters in the men, and while we feel the woes and wrongs of the most distant of our kind, we shall stretch forth the arms of Christian charity to those who from the nearest shore are barbarously driven into them (p.1167).

Hadland notes that the *Reading Mercury* put the case for the exiles in very similar terms in its edition of 15 October 1792: “They have been driven from a country where no one is safe ... to seek shelter among Englishmen and Christians. The glory of our national character is generous compassion and they surely have the strongest claims on us who suffer persecution for conscience sake.” In response to such pleas from Catholics and Anglicans alike, the priests were allowed to continue to practise their religion with relative impunity. Private rooms were found for them to use as chapels, some of which were open to the public, and many were taken into Catholic homes and allowed the liberty of saying mass on a daily basis. The government funded hostels in which they could also live and worship. In 1793, the government agreed to award the French clergy an annual fund from the national exchequer of about 200,000 pounds. Not a dissenting voice was raised in the House of Commons when Pitt suggested the award, notes Ward (II, p.30).² In 1795 the support of the King went so far as to direct the government to send armed ships to bring to safety as many ecclesiastics who were trying to flee the Republican invasion of Holland as possible.³

In return, the priests showed discretion with regards to the practice of their religion, but openly displayed their gratitude and loyalty to George III. Burke called the general

¹ As Sage claims, see introduction.

² The decision was also supported by the Established Church, which directed its ministers to plead the cause of the French priests from the pulpit.

³ From the Catholic Directory of 1796, cited in Ward, Vol. II, p.127.

behaviour of the priests “exemplary” and claimed that their gratitude – such as floral tributes incorporating the slogans ‘God Save the King’ and ‘You Could Not Have Guided Us Better’ placed in the front garden of a hostel¹ - “greatly added to the compassion excited by their unmerited sufferings.”² Many bishops, Cardinal de Rohan for example, lived in poverty comparable to that of the lower clergy and declared themselves rejuvenated in their vocation, as if the reformation of the inordinately wealthy and privileged French Church, as originally envisaged in 1789, actually took place in these small refugee communities. Such conduct elicited praise and admiration from the establishment. In a sermon in October 1793, the prebendary of Winchester Thomas Rennell described “their calm and cheerful Resignation, their warm and EXUBERANT GRATITUDE... their most edifying and exemplary Piety” and went so far as to call them “persecuted martyrs.. ...God hath not left himself *without witness here on earth.*”³ Fanny Burney, in a pamphlet entitled *Brief Reflections Relative to the French Emigrant Clergy* (1793) observed:

Let us look at the Emigrant French Clergy, and ask where is the Englishman, where, indeed, the human being, in whom a sense of right can more disinterestedly have been demonstrated, or more nobly predominate?. . . Flourishing and happy ourselves, shall we see cast upon our coasts virtue we scarce thought mortal, sufferers whose story we could not read without tears, martyrs that remind us of other days, and let them perish?⁴

Burney’s reference to the priests as “martyrs that remind us of other days” indicates that she sees these priests as embodying all Christian suffering, throughout history. Her sentiments (as well as her title) recall Burke and his impassioned views on the French Clergy in *Reflections*. In an unpublished letter from Burke to Dr. Burney – Fanny’s father – in September 1793, Burke claims: “Their cause is our own, if the cause of honour, religion, fidelity, an adherence to the grand foundations of social order, be our cause” (*Juniper Hall*, p.182). One only has to read some of the sermons reviewed in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* for 1793 to see that although charity to the émigrés began in the name of common humanity, the refugees came in many respects to symbolize the Christian Church itself besieged from all sides by infidelity

¹ Cited in Hadland.

² From his appeal to the English nation on behalf of the subscriptions’ committee, entitled “Case of the Suffering Clergy of France, Refugees in the British Dominions” cited in full in Ward, Vol. II, p.293.

³ *Principles of French republicanism essentially founded on Violence and Blood-guiltiness*, a sermon by Thomas Rennell, Prebendary of Winchester, reviewed in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* December 1793, p.1123 (it is of interest to note that Rennell was well known to James and Henry Austen, the brothers of Jane Austen).

⁴ *Brief Reflections Relative to the French Emigrant* (1793) cited in Constance Hill, *Juniper Hall: a rendezvous of certain illustrious personages during the French revolution, including Alexandre d'Arblay and Fanny Burney* (London: New York: J. Lane, 1905), p.185-6.

and indifference. In a more general sense they evoked the orthodox virtues that kept Burke's grand foundations of social order in place. Simply, the recusant priests became a symbol of devotion to organized religion and loyalty to the monarchy and the old order - everything the Revolution was striving to supplant. Burke emphasized in his letter to Dr. Burney that charity for the French clergy should be taken up explicitly on the ground that their cause "is our own". That way, he candidly claims, "our charity would not have been the less charity, and it would answer a great political purpose into the bargain": namely, the counter-revolutionary cause.

Burke's astute use of the plight of the French clergy to underpin and promote his own conservative beliefs stirred others to see the benefit for themselves and for England in this uncommon situation. Historians have noted the way that the Church of England in particular used the situation of the French clergy to their advantage. D.A. Bellenger has argued that Anglican charity was a political act more than anything else: an opportunity for the Church to raise a counterposition to the progress of secularism.¹

However, the Catholic body in England also realized the opportunities with which the recusant clergy presented them - in their case on behalf of the cause of Emancipation. In 1794 John Milner sent several extraordinary letters to the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Dr. Milner was pastor of the Catholic chapel at Winchester from 1780-1803 (the chapel at Winchester being one of the few Catholic chapels in the South of England to be openly supported before the 1791 Act). In 1798, Milner - whose own chapel at Winchester was a pioneering Gothic revival building - published a highly praised treatise on Gothic architecture, *The History of Winchester*, whose thesis appealed to those who, as R.J. Smith says, "in literature and politics alike made a fetish of feudalism and chivalry".² Milner's work claimed the Gothic Revival for Catholics: it criticized contemporary society through the comparison of medieval and modern Winchester, and claimed that the source of the superiority of the medieval world was Roman Catholicism.³ Clearly, Milner was taking advantage of the 'romantic'

¹ D.A.Bellenger, "The Émigré Clergy and the English Church, 1789-1815", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 34 (1983): pp.392-410. See also Mather's argument about Bishop Horsley, p.115.

² R.J.Smith, "Cobbett, Catholic History and the Middle Ages", *Studies in Medievalism*, Vol. 4 (1992): pp.113-142, p.119.

³ As Smith rightly asserts, Milner was the representative of "many traditionally-minded Catholics [who] regarded their Church as the heir of the medieval Church and saw the Middle Ages ..as the era of their lost pre-eminence" (p.117-8). *The History of Winchester* was hugely popular, an abridgement of the original alone going through 11 editions by the mid-nineteenth century, supporting Smith's claim that "outside the Catholic groups Milner's combination of local antiquarian compilation and great architectural detail had wide appeal, while the social implications..made it an influential as well as an attractive book" (p.119). I would argue that the success of Milner's book alone complicates the argument put forward by Wolfram Schmidgen that the Gothic Revival loosened the association of Gothic architecture with Catholicism, and it was this loosening that legitimized the

appropriation of medievalism to promote his own denomination. But he had a more detailed agenda, too. Milner was anxious to check the reform movement within the Catholic denomination and he used every opportunity to promote the 'orthodoxy' of traditional Roman Catholicism, appealing to conservatives in the Established Church who could be most easily wooed with the argument that those who began by 'reforming' ended by destroying all social order.

During the Revolutionary years, Milner was brought into daily contact with the émigré priests and religious.¹ The letters that Milner sent to the *Gentleman's Magazine* were from recusants still practising their religion under the shadow of the axe in France. Distressing as he must have found reports of the persecution and massacre of his co-religionists, Milner had something of a vested interest in publishing them. These letters show traditional Roman Catholics in an ideal light. This evidence of a promotion of Roman Catholics being diffused to the thousands of readers of the *Gentleman's Magazine* should be weighed against claims of the English public's allegedly vigorous anti-Catholicism at this time. In providing us with grounds for qualifying criticism's claims, the evidence of the *Gentleman's Magazine* is also offering a new foundation for the way we think about the Gothic and its representation of the Church which scholars argue reflects public opinion.

The first letter is from one M. Linsolaz, grand vicar of Lyons. Linsolaz is describing the persecution to a friend in Germany, only a few days before he is guillotined. What he describes can have left the English reader in no doubt that the situation for the priesthood in France had become hopeless. Priests had either to deny their religious principles or die:

When a priest is apprehended, the usual question is, *Have you taken the oath?* If he answers, *No*; the immediate reply is *Die then*. If he asserts that he has sworn, he is then questioned, *Will you renounce your priesthood?* - If he refuses compliance, death is the certain consequence...As to the women, the common address to them is, *Either renounce your fanaticism, or we will have your life*. They are generally firm, and, in consequence, are beheaded.²

movement for civic and royal appropriation (Wolfram Schmidgen, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Law of Property* (Port Chester, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.163. Later, as Raymond Chapman shows in his excellent analysis of Medievalism and Anglo-Catholicism in the nineteenth century, John Henry Newman and the Tractarians would also embrace medievalism as representative of a Catholic position. Their heirs the Anglo-Catholics were to revive medieval church furnishings, architecture and even vestments in a move towards creating their own Gothic form of catholicity, that is, as distinct from the Romans (for example, Anglo-Catholics promoted the virtues of Plainsong over the Baroque music and modern hymns preferred by the Roman Church). Raymond Chapman, "Last Enchantments; Medievalism and the early Anglo-Catholic", *Studies in Medievalism*, Vol. 4 1992, pp.170-186, pp.172 – 177.

¹ He established in his mission a convent of Benedictine nuns, formerly of Brussels. A community of Franciscans from Bruges likewise settled at Winchester.

² April 1794, p. 325.

Linsalez turns this stark picture of persecution into an uplifting narrative, however:

In no age has the History of the Church furnished brighter models. Almost all those who suffer here die Catholics, and publicly declare that their cause is that of religion and of their king. At the foot of the scaffold they give each other the kiss of peace, and they are seen to be resigned, cheerful, and happy...

The scene is poignant, brilliant, it is an illustration of martyrs being made. As the letter comes to a close, Linsalez' manner changes: it becomes oratorical and heroic:

With respect to myself, unworthy as I am, I have still a firm confidence in the prayers of my friends who are gone before, that I shall attain to the same happiness. My comfort is, that the diocese is now provided with superiors. Here then I remain at my proper post, taking all the precautions which prudence suggests, not to expose myself to danger, which would be an act of presumption, but expecting every day to be apprehended; a fate which, in the estimation of the religionists of the present day, you know I richly merited; and, if I am seized upon, most certainly, they will not leave me to rot in prison. O, my worthy friend! That will be the day of my triumph.

Linsalez' letter offers powerful testimony of the loyalty of papists (here "publicly [declaring] their cause is that of religion and of their king" at the very moment of death). Moreover it speaks of their enthusiasm for loyalty. In these passages we can see something of that pathos and glamour of the lost cause being cast on Roman Catholicism, of which O'Brien argues: Linsalez'/Milner's letter supports O'Brien's claim that Roman Catholicism was developing the appeal of the romantic and that such an appeal was becoming socially relevant. In the December 1794 edition of the magazine, a set of letters from a persecuted clergyman, once again sent in by Milner, were published. Milner sent the letters in an attempt to correct "the opinion of most persons [in Britain]...that Christianity is entirely eradicated out of France" (p.1070). He wishes to inform the reading public that a great majority in France still adheres to the faith and that "there are many zealous missionaries...who, in defiance of the guillotine, which is ever reeking with the blood of some of their number, continue to exercise their heroic ministry" (p.1070). The letters were written in March 1794 in Marseilles by a priest to the vicar-general of his diocese. The excerpts were printed under the title "The Piety and Sufferings of the Clergy in France":¹

¹ The writer's identity was concealed.

Our affairs go on very ill. All good people here are murdered, sometimes to the number of 17 at a time. Religion is abolished, the churches are destroyed, and the figure of Christ crucified is dragged through the streets, and pelted by the very children. I come now to speak of myself. I have made an offering of my life to God, and have taken the Holy Sacraments by way of *viaticum*, or preparation for my exit. Thus armed, I go about from house to house, and, raising the crucifix, which I usually wear at my breast, I exclaim, 'My brethren, take your part: will you or will you not adhere to Jesus Christ?' The answer is generally in the affirmative. 'Well then,' I rejoin, 'prepare yourselves to martyrdom: I am come to assist you..'...I sometimes walk six leagues in one night amidst rocks and declivities. But, how amply have I been repaid for my toils! I have had the happiness to bring back to the faith a whole village at a time;...I have found young men, who lately were in a scandalous degree luxurious, sensual, worldly, and incredulous, now with a catechism in their hands, learning the first elements of their religion, suffering the most rigorous austerities, and spending the greatest part of the day in prayer...Our religious women are equally heroical in their behaviour:..they are as firm as a rock amidst want, bonds and the impending terrors of the axe...I leave you now to judge whether I have not sufficient inducements to make a sacrifice of my repose...(p.1071).

This text is filled with primitive Christian emblems: the narrator wears as armour the sacrament and the crucifix, and he walks a biblical landscape of 'rocks and declivities'. The language at times is biblical: the women (the nuns) are 'firm as a rock' although in 'bonds'. This is the picture of an apostolic movement. It would strongly recall scriptural portrayals of the ministry of the early Christian Church. Milner would have been well aware of how the appeal to orthodoxy was turning the tide of feeling towards Catholics. By offering these letters for publication in a popular periodical – narratives that bear witness in a personal, intimate voice to the 'heroism' of their dead authors – Milner was shaping pro-Catholic discourse, contributing to the image of persecuted Catholics as apostolic Christians, as Christianity itself struggling "amidst rocks and declivities.. want, bonds and the impending terrors of the axe", and fighting to win back "the sensual, worldly, and incredulous".

Given that the *Gentleman's Magazine* was one of the two most popular journals of the period, these reports, and many more like them, must have been read by a wide audience. Did such reports create sympathy for Roman Catholics? Could they have influenced English attitudes toward Catholics and Catholicism? This study of the *Gentleman's Magazine* explores some examples of a sympathetic attitude towards 'popery'.

During the Terror, the magazine published articles written in a new spirit of sorrow for the loss of French Catholicism, such as an inventory by Aubin-Louis Millin of Catholic treasures, paintings, idols, monuments and buildings destroyed by the National Convention and the people. As the editor comments, "We commend M. Millin's intention to preserve, as

much as he can, the antient glory of his country in the monument of their Piety and Loyalty - virtues now reduced to obsolete and obnoxious words".¹ It is notable, given the alleged "rabid anti-Catholicism" of the period, to see an English publication describing Catholic statuary, art, places of worship, etc. as monuments to piety and loyalty. It is also perhaps surprising to read that "a considerable number of the most respectable English families in the city [of Winchester]" attended a funeral service for Louis XVI held by the French priests of the King's House in Winchester;² of Protestants and Methodists standing under a wall to hear a community of monks sing (Ward, II, p.35); of crowds of "persons of the highest rank in the country, of every religious denomination" gathering to celebrate what can only be described as a spectacularly Gothic Mass with French refugees in the Spanish Chapel in London - and to witness this English periodical not muttering about popish idolatry, but rather reporting that "the whole religious ceremony was grand, impressive, and affecting".³

The mere presence and conduct of the French priests went some way towards dispelling many myths about papism. David Mathew notes that the priests "did much to break down prejudice"⁴ which, as Hadland asserts, "undoubtedly helped the progress towards Catholic emancipation". In particular, England's charitable treatment of the French clergy resulted in greatly improved relations between the Vatican and the British government.

I am arguing that the French clergy helped to rehabilitate at some level the reputation of Catholicism. The political results of what I am suggesting are well-known. The full support of the heads of the Anglican establishment - the bishops, cathedral chapters, ancient universities - for the French clergy led to royal and civil endorsement, followed by official funding in 1793. This provoked the question of emancipation for Catholics. In 1793 the Irish Parliament was persuaded by Pitt's government to pass a Relief Act which gave Irish Catholics the right to vote.⁵ In 1794, a concession was granted to English Catholics, when double land tax (initiated in 1692) was abolished. Soon, says Hadland, the government was finding it difficult to explain the curious anomaly whereby French Catholics enjoyed

¹ January 1793, pp.49-52.

² *Gentleman's Magazine*, October 1793, p.931.

³ *Gentleman's Magazine*, March 1793, p.252.

⁴ David Mathew, *Catholicism in England, 1535-1935; portrait of a minority: its culture and tradition* (London, New York: Longmans, Green and co., 1936), p.161

⁵ This in an attempt to diminish the threat of Catholics and Dissenters in Ireland uniting against Anglican rule. Voters had to be 40/- freeholders and although they could stand as candidates, they were not allowed to take a seat in parliament. Before 1829, Catholics could vote only for Anglicans.

greater freedom in England than their English counterparts. In 1797, the Prince of Wales was putting pressure on the prime minister for Catholic Emancipation.¹

In addition to the political advances won by Catholics at this time, it is clear that a discourse was taking place amongst Church leaders, prominent Church members and scholars exploring the possibility of unity between the Church of England and Catholics.² A ‘Mr. Ciprian’ writing from Westminster in April 1794 asks, “Have we not at this moment a Prelacy, a presbytery, our distinguished Theologians and Schoolmen in the nurseries of Literature,³ equally forward in their wishes towards unity?” And he continues:

Let them (Romanists) give candidly their own doctrines; let the lives of the exiles from France speak; let their practices, their dealings, their piety, teach whether the horrid picture of Popery ought to be retained in our idea; for, if these men are well with us, if they give credit to the Church of Gallia, we shall hear them one and all own their chief is Pius VI at Rome ... Under our own distinguished Prelacy - under the clement pontiff Pius VI - embracing the moments French politicks has thrown in our way to see what French Roman Catholicks are in practice, and to judge of the Roman Catholic religion by them, let me..hope, wish, and expect that Heaven will indulge our wish...for unity and no separation (p.511).

‘Mr. Ciprian’ is not a Catholic. It is more likely that his wish “for unity and no separation” reflects his High Church interests: Mather notes that during the eighteenth century ‘strict’ high churchmen “were never more than a substantial minority even among the bishops but the strength of their leadership, when the Church was believed to be in danger, qualified them to represent the larger number of ‘Church and King’ men” (p.306). The influence of this powerful minority, then, may be at the root of the discourse represented by this and other letters to the *Gentleman’s Magazine*,⁴ in which is felt the resonance of French Catholic

¹ Letter from the Prince of Wales to Pitt, February 8, 1797 in *Despatches, Correspondence and Memoranda of Field Marshall Arthur Duke of Wellington, K.G.* ed. Duke of Wellington (London, 1873), pp.402-3.

² Evidence of this discourse can be found in several letters, and is alluded to in a review of three sermons (two by Francis Wollaston (October 1793, p.936) and one by a Mr. Glasse (August 1793 pp.730-732). A presbyter of the Church of England writes: “Sentiments of esteem have been mutually cultivated: *we* have admired their firmness and constancy; *they* have received our bounty. Although the Romish Church has delighted in a grand and pompous exterior, yet we are happy to discover meekness, patience, and resignation in her members. The Protestant Church has been most distinguished for her faith and opinions; yet the Romanists must have rejoiced to have received substantial proofs of her charity. All must agree that an union is most desirable; nothing but evil can result from division; and these evils of animosity, calumny, suspicion, and contempt, have too long existed. Why should the members of Christ’s mystical body be divided? Why should his seamless garment be torn asunder? Why should the children of the Church say, “I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos,” when by this means they leave the One Fountain of all Truth, and the Centre of Union?” (June 1794, p.510). Mather notes that the influential bishop of Durham supported the idea of “reunion” with Roman Catholics (p.211).

³ It is worth noting that Oxford University had printed, at its own expense, the Vulgate translation of the New Testament for the use of the French priests.

⁴ John Phelan writes “How desirable an object to all loves of evangelic accord!” July 1794, p.591. ‘R.D’ writes “The disposition, which now seems generally to prevail, towards cultivating a good understanding and friendly intercourse between the English and Gallican churches, with a view to effect a reconciliation between those

“firmness and constancy” and all that it represented for the English establishment.¹ If French Catholic priests made such an impact as to inspire “a Prelacy, a Presbytery” and “distinguished Theologians and Schoolmen” into taking part in a dialogue of coalition, then we must acknowledge that they greatly added to the advancing of the reputation of Roman Catholicism in England. As did, I would argue, the nuns and monks that came with them.

From the point of view of this study, the case of the English monastic communities is particularly interesting. In critical discussions of the representation of nuns and monks, monasteries and convents in Gothic fiction, I have not found a critic who offers an accurate description of their status in England during the 1790s. Sage incorrectly states, for example, that “in [Radcliffe’s] England the monastic orders were prohibited” (*Horror Fiction*, p.33). In fact, although in 1800 the House of Commons gave a large majority to a bill reinstating restraints on monasticism, it was rejected by the House of Lords. Archbishop Horsley, leading the opposition, called the bill “altogether unnecessary, dangerous, and unconstitutional”.² Tompkins equally wrongly claims that “there were no convents in England” when the Gothic novelists were writing. Summers agrees, claiming that monasteries were merely a fantasy, a romantic dream, to the English imagination: “In England, at any rate, there were no cloisters, no convents, [rather] the venerable ruins of the hallowed homes of days long since passed” which readers could ponder upon and dream about, as “the girl who reads of desert tents and handsome sheiks” will dream in her bedroom of the “soft thud of horses’ hoofs over the burning sand” (p.197-198). Most critics follow Summers in reading Gothic’s use of monastery and convent, monk and nun as a foray into the ‘exotic’ made possible by England’s geographic distance from such institutions. It is because monasteries were one of those Catholic anachronisms symbolizing the dark ages - “just so much historical residue” as Diane Hoeveler says (p.67) - that Gothic novelists could capitalize on the atmospheric and emotional possibilities of monastic settings and situations. Summers declares categorically that “Religious were a people unseen, unknown, of an infinite mystery...monasteries and cloisters...were remote; they were unknown; who in England had ever penetrated within a convent’s walls?” (p.192, 197). Again, this is inexact on two counts. Firstly, there were monks in England throughout the eighteenth century and

venerable bodies, must give infinite pleasure to all true Christians who understand the nature and constitution of the Holy Catholic Church, and have its welfare sincerely at heart” (March 1794, p.204).

¹ Of course, opposition to the suggestion of union is also printed: “This is not a time to sport with establishments, or hazard experiments!” splutters ‘Another Presbyter of the Church of England’ (August 1794, p.696). Other contributors argue that the Gallican Church should be brought nearer to the English, as it is not the latter that is in need of reform.

² Cited in Mather, p.109.

people knew of their existence. For example the Bar Convent in York, founded in 1686, remained active throughout the following century, its neo-classical domed chapel built in 1766 to designs by Thomas Atkinson. According to G. Dolan Benedictine monks inhabited Hyde House in Winchester from the early to mid-eighteenth century; they were “tolerated with residence”.¹ And Parson James Woodforde in a diary entry in 1786 records that he met a monk (the chaplain to an influential Catholic family) at a distinguished gathering.² Secondly, C.D. Van Strien’s study of British tourism in the Netherlands in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries records the almost obligatory nature of visits to English convents.³ During this period the exposure of middle- and upper-class Englishmen and women to monastic culture was more frequent than perhaps has been assumed. Visits to English religious houses abroad by tourists had become a standard ingredient of the European tour - Thomas Gray and Horace Walpole visited many monasteries and convents during their European tour together in 1739-1741⁴: so much so that nunneries traded in souvenirs for their foreign visitors.⁵ Van Strien’s study demonstrates how many travel journals of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries mention visits to English religious houses and how, after Joseph Shaw’s descriptions in *Letters to a Nobleman* (1700), guidebooks began to mention nunneries and monasteries (p.501). Observations on the interiors, inhabitants and practices of religious houses were thus widely disseminated. It is also worth remembering the poor Englishwomen who lived in convents as boarders and that many English girls attended French convent-schools, as Tompkins herself notes (*Casebook*, p.92).

The French Revolution however could be said to have reintroduced monasticism to England. Twenty-one of the twenty-three English convents in France, and several communities of monks were helped by English Catholics to settle on English soil. Moreover, the seminary at Ware (Old Hall) was founded in 1793 as a substitute for Douai, and the famous Jesuit College at St. Omer relocated to Stonyhurst in Lancashire in 1794. Ampleforth Abbey was established in 1802 and Downside Abbey was settled in 1814. It therefore seems historically inaccurate to assume that the monks and nuns of Gothic are nothing more than

¹ G. Dolan, “The English Benedictine Missions”, *The Downside Review*, volume 20 (1901): pp.104 –118.

² “Nov. 10th 1786 ...Evening at Weston House with Mr and Mrs Custance, Mrs Collyer Senr. and a Mr Chamberlain who is a Roman Catholic Priest and ...and has been made a monk. A very good kind of man he appears to be and very sensible.. He is now Chaplain to Sir Wm. Jernegan that family being of the Romish persuasion.” James Woodforde, *The Diary of a Country Parson*, ed. John Beresford (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p.287-288.

³ C.D. Van Strien, “Recusant Houses in the Southern Netherlands as seen by British Tourists, c. 1650-1720”, *Recusant History*, Vol. 20, No. 4 October 1991: pp.495-512.

⁴ See *The Letters of Thomas Gray*, ed. Duncan C. Tovey (London: George Bell and Sons, 1909), pp.15-93.

⁵ Van Strien, p.505; see also *Letters of Thomas Gray*, *ibid.*

the ornaments of an exotic, foreign landscape. First hand accounts of their reception by local inhabitants sit uneasily with our assumptions about xenophobia and the overwhelming “historical fears” of the culture into which the monastics were settling. Indeed, the smoothness of their transplantation is striking. In particular, communities became the objects of avid interest and curiosity. The first community to arrive was a French convent of Benedictine nuns with strong English connections who were passing through England in October 1792 on their way to Brussels when they were met and advised by the Prince of Wales that England would prove the safer haven and decided to stay. *The Oracle* adds to our knowledge of this royal visit:

The Nuns who arrived at Brighthelmstone, at the time of their debarkation had only about thirty pounds of specie remaining, all the valuables of their Convent having been seized by the *regenerate* French. The PRINCE and MRS. FITZHERBERT paid them a very long visit, at the New Ship Inn; after which His Royal Highness set on foot a subscription for their relief, which, in a short time, amounted to upwards of one hundred pounds.

The above Ladies on the evening of their arrival celebrated High Mass, with great solemnity, in an apartment at their inn.¹

It is interesting to read here of a royal subscription being initiated for the nuns. It is a fact that the English religious communities did not share the funds and accommodation provided by the British government for the French priests, but *The Oracle* clearly shows that some monastic groups were directly aided by the establishment. The women did encounter a small measure of prejudice (interestingly *The Oracle* ends its report by stating “It was remarkable that no two of the above Nuns could be prevailed upon to sleep in one bed” – a curious statement, which can be read as positive or negative!) but finally they settled in Norfolk where the locals were said to be “remarkably fond” of them (Ward, II, p.33). The first monks were a group of Trappists who came to England in 1794 by way of extended sojourns in Switzerland and the Netherlands. They were given a home (and later a monastery) by Thomas Weld of Lulworth Castle, who also gave Stonyhurst to the Jesuits. Weld reports in a letter to his bishop:

..their looks are cheerful, you see a peace and content of mind on their countenances, that surpass all I have ever seen in any persons in my life before....when they appear in public at work in ye fields or the garden, they take off their cowl, and put on a smock frock such as carters wear in this country, and then put on a worsted wig, and a round hat, by that means they appear like any

¹ *The Oracle*, Wednesday October 31st, 1792.

other day labourer; nobody molests or disturbs them, everybody is edified by them... I think their manner of life is so striking that it will produce good effects amongst the people (Ward, II, p.35).

This report of the edifying nature of the monastic “manner of life” on their neighbourhood seems to complicate critical accounts of “widespread and profound anxiety” about Catholicism in England at the time. To be sure, the nuns and monks were unfamiliar – as Denis Agius relates: “When a Catholic gentleman told his coachman to go and meet some nuns at Dover, the poor man, who had never heard of nuns, thought it was a new kind of French potato he had to collect.”¹ But overall accounts of their experiences describe only the ease of the process of repatriation and rehabilitation once English soil was attained. The experience of a community of Benedictine nuns from the Monastery of Our Lady of Good Hope in Paris, who moved to England in 1795, is transcribed from their records thus: “As refugees from France, they received a warm welcome. It was now legal for priests to say Mass, so they could live quietly as nuns. After a brief stay in London, friends provided them with a house at Marnhull in Dorset, and regular monastic life began again.”² Here is evidence that in England, “regular monastic life” could be lived. The annals of the Benedictine nuns of the Community of the Glorious Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary report no intimidation or distress, rather that the nuns were proud to be the first English convent or monastic house to arrive in England.³ A Poor Clare of Dunkirk, moving with her community to Yorkshire in 1807 from Northumberland, wrote of small kindnesses: “We are well received by all. [The Parson’s] wife sends us milk twice a week and gives us a little mug of cream, etc. every now and then...and very often comes to see us; many of the people come to see us and strive to help us in different occasions, sometimes a few eggs and, just in a word, as kind providence seems to inspire.”⁴ Again this account gives evidence of local interest in the nuns, and of curiosity and sympathy, and it shows that the nuns were rehabilitating the image of conventualism to the extent that they were being accepted in small villages and towns. Naturally I am not suggesting that there were no opposing voices to their settlement:

¹ From the Annals of the English Benedictines of Ghent, Oulton (1894): p.81; cited in Dom Denis Agius, “Benedictines under the terror 1794-95”, *English Benedictine Congregation History Commission Symposium Papers* (1982): p.1.

² “From Paris to Colwich”, *Saint Mary’s Abbey, Colwich, Staffordshire website*, 24 May 2003 <<http://www.colwichabbey.org.uk/places/places.htm>>

³ Dom Aidan Bellenger, “The Brussels Nuns at Winchester 1794-1857”, *English Benedictine Congregation History Commission Symposium Papers* (1999) <<http://www.catholic-history.org.uk/ebc/1999bellenger.pdf>> The nuns moved to a house in Winchester owned by the father of one of them, and were aided by the London clergy, the Catholic gentry and the French Refugee Committee.

⁴ Cited in Ann M.C. Forster, “The Chronicles of the English Poor Clares of Rouen – II”, *Recusant History*, Vol. 18, No. 2. October 1986, pp.149-192, p.159.

obviously prejudice was not entirely broken down. In 1796 Bernard Hodson, the Principal of Hertford College, Oxford, published a poem entitled *The Monastery. A Poem on the building of a Monastery in Dorsetshire, 1795* in which he voiced serious concerns about the influence of the new monastery in Lulworth (which he claims had ‘turned’ half of the locals Catholic, the parish-clerk among them).¹ In the same year there were many satires in the newspapers “against the nuns of Amesbury” as Bishop Douglass recorded (Ward, II, p115). But the latter were “answered and scouted [in the newspapers] for their illiberality”, and the King himself gave orders that the luggage of one order of nuns should pass through customs unexamined (Ward, p.116). Such evidence suggests that in our critical analysis of literary Gothic conventions we should adjust our picture of a xenophobic and anti-papist England void of convents and monasteries to one of an England where monastic communities were being “tolerated with residence” for the first time in centuries, and where the presence of nuns and monks was generating interest and sympathy.

The rehabilitation of the reputation of Catholicism in the 1790s does not seem to have been greatly hampered by later events which sparked anti-Catholic feeling. The Irish rebellion of 1798 and the Concordat of 1801 and coronation of 1804 when the Roman Catholic Church and the French Republic and Empire were reconciled, fanned anti-Catholic flames everywhere. However the Roman Catholic community in England had made irreversible gains both infrastructurally and socially of which it could not be entirely deprived by any amount of anti-Catholic backlash. A climate of sympathy for the French émigré clergy combined with an already-gathering wave of sentiment for Christianity in general and a strong measure of toleration for Catholics in particular, to increase support for the French clergy and secure further relief from the Penal Laws for their British co-religionists. But furthermore, Anglicans found a new level of toleration and respect for Catholicism, its aesthetics and its practices, which made it possible for the Catholic Church to put down roots in England once more. The *Gentleman’s Magazine* is most effective for pinpointing small events, debates, publications and discourses that historians and critics may have missed, but that were shaping attitudes on a day-to-day basis in 1790s England.

¹ Hodson was worried about the amount of indulgence that had been granted to Catholics who were in his opinion set on Roman domination once more. He called for the complete cessation of all indulgence until the Catholics completely renounced the supremacy of the Pope. John Milner wrote several letters in opposition to his proposal to *The Gentleman’s Magazine* in July and August of 1796. Actually, new professions of nuns and monks were few, as Bishop Horsley illustrated in his speech to the House of Lords in opposition to the bill restricting Roman Catholic convents and schools in 1800.

CHAPTER 2

Roman(ticized) Catholicism in Literature and Culture in the Eighteenth Century

The last chapter gave a picture of English sympathy towards Catholics that existed in an era often defined by scholars as strictly antagonistic towards the Roman Church. Linda Colley for example acknowledges the “marked change in attitudes in Great Britain which had preceded [the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829]” (which she sees mainly as a result of “the intellectual impact of the Enlightenment” and “loyal and substantial Catholic service” in the British army),¹ but her prevailing argument is that a sense of ‘Protestant-ness’ strongly characterized by anti-Catholicism was significant in shaping emergent conceptions of Britishness. James Sack, on the other hand, argues that throughout the eighteenth century Protestant England felt a “tug from Rome”. Sack’s claim underpins the assertions of this thesis in its insistence that the second half of the century saw a “pro-Catholic attitude” amongst members of the eighteenth-century English Right arising partly from residual Jacobitism and Toryism, and partly from “an ideological grouping of orthodox Trinitarian sympathizers, Roman Catholics and Anglicans, united in the face of increasing rationalistic Unitarianism of the dissenting churches....[and] the Voltaireian menace” (Sack, p.223).

Critics argue that the Gothic writers were fascinated, in a wholly negative way, with Catholicism.² They flirted nervously with the aesthetics of the Roman Church, and their representation of the Church as a monstrosity of the gothic age - albeit a very atmospheric one that could breathe life into their representations of the past - gained them tacit acceptance with their readership. Such representations, it is assumed, point to an English Protestant reading public that was firmly anti-Catholic.³ But I want to argue that Gothic’s treatment of Catholicism - and religion in general - is more ambiguous than criticism is willing to admit. As Howard argues, Lewis’ extensive use of previous discourses involves him in unavoidable contradictions which prevent *The Monk* from being “simply a polemic against Catholicism” (Howard, p.193). Similarly, Radcliffe poses a few unresolved questions for the school of thought that presupposes an entirely anti-Catholic agenda in her works. Although Radcliffe’s novels customarily demonstrate an aversion to the restrictions and oppressions of orthodox

¹ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), ps. 325, 326-327.

² See McWhir, p.37.

³ See Sage and Tumbleson particularly.

religious practices, she portrays in a positive light the taking of monastic vows in *A Sicilian Romance* (1790). In the story, the nun Cornelia recounts her ill-starred love-affair with a young man named Angelo, and retirement to a convent. There, “holy enthusiasm” subordinates earthly passion:

At the expiration of the year I received the veil. Oh! I well remember with what perfect resignation, with what comfortable complacency I took those vows which bound me to a life of retirement, and religious rest. The high importance of the moment, the solemnity of the ceremony, the sacred glooms which surrounded me, and the chilling silence that prevailed when I uttered the irrevocable vow—all conspired to impress my imagination, and to raise my views to heaven. When I knelt at the altar, the sacred flame of pure devotion glowed in my heart, and elevated my soul to sublimity. The world and all its recollections faded from my mind, and left it to the influence of a serene and holy enthusiasm which no words can describe.¹

How can we usefully account for this moment in which monastic mysticism is viewed with a sentimental eye by the supposed fiercely Protestant Radcliffe? It is these ambiguities in the works of the leading Gothic writers Lewis and Radcliffe (to be explored in chapter 3) that have led certain critics - Clara Tuite for example - to conclude that “what is significant about 1790s' Gothic—and about the 1790s period and the Gothic genre—is that it is not at all clear that the Gothic worked or was received as unproblematically Protestant and anti-Catholic” (*Cloistered Closets*). Eleanor Sleath, Catharine Selden, Louisa Sidney Stanhope, Agnes Lancaster, Agnes Maria Bennet and many other Gothic writers expand the picture further. These writers, as chapters 4 and 5 will show, all use Catholic motifs positively in narratives that set out to persuade the reader of the moral superiority and sublimity of Christian devotion. It is not clear in the light of evidence such as this that the popular Gothic novel *was* working or being received as straightforwardly Protestant and anti-Catholic. Is this merely an assumption of twentieth-century criticism?

Previous scholarship bases its reading of Gothic's anti-Catholic character on the Gothic writers' appropriation of themes and motifs from the scandalous anti-Catholic tales developed by seventeenth-century German and French Protestant controversialists, the anticlericalism of the *Sturm and Drang* and popular German fiction, and the sensationalism of 1790s French drama under the Revolution.² This is certainly the case in some instances:

¹Ann Radcliffe, *A Sicilian Romance* (Poole: New York: Woodstock Books, 1995), p.39-40.

² See Howard ps.201, 233. The writers of the Revolution composed virulently anti-clerical, anti-monastic plays in support of the abolition of religious orders (1790), the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and the subsequent attack on the Catholic Church. These plays continued to be performed throughout the period of

Lewis' nun Agnes, buried alive in a vault where she gives birth to a baby and goes mad is a scene that directly recalls what Kennedy terms "the necrophiliac cavern and corpse shows" of the 1790s such as Marsollier's popular *Camille ou le souterrain*. Lewis mentions in a letter to his mother that he saw *Les Victimes cloitrées* (1791) and *Camille ou le souterrain* in Paris in 1791 (see Summers, p.225). From such evidence it is argued that the Gothic feeds into an established anti-Catholic Protestant literary tradition.

In this chapter I want to introduce new evidence to suggest that the Gothic also borrows themes from much earlier French texts which offer a sentimental representation of monks and nuns, convents and monasteries, and the rites and practices of Catholicism. These texts, translated into English very early on in the eighteenth century, had been imitated by English writers for decades by the time the Gothiccists came to appropriate them: Radcliffe's *Cornelia*, for example, is a type taken from a piece by Addison, purportedly taken from the French, entitled *Theodosius and Constantia* published in *The Spectator* in 1711. Once the themes of these Catholic texts had been appropriated by English writers, they were employed as pious and romantic devices, and occasionally as vehicles for anti-Catholic polemic. Their usage in Gothic fiction is similarly varied yet criticism has chosen to focus on the anti-Catholic. What this chapter aims to show is how wide open these tropes were to different kinds of appropriation.

If the Gothic was "an arena open, from the first, to the social and political interests of the day" as Sage says (*Gothick Novel*, p.8), then contemporaneous representations of Catholicism are important to our study of the Gothic. The last chapter showed that there is a need to change the emphasis in our description of English political attitudes towards Catholics from rabid antipathy to sympathy and even co-patriotism. This chapter seeks to challenge the established idea that writers representing Catholicism were doing so only to expose the superstition and irrationality of the Catholic Church. As Tompkins acknowledges, Catholicism inspires the eighteenth-century sentimental imagination - Addison's *Theodosius and Constantia* prompts her to acknowledge that in England "the conflict of love and vows was a recognized source of pathos" (*Gothick Romance*, p.93). But she does not explore to

dechristianisation. In his survey of plays reviewed in the *Journal des Spectacles* (the Revolution's first dedicated theatre paper), Emmet Kennedy cites plays such as Olympe de Gouges' *Le Couvent ou les vœux forces* as typical of the period's theatrical fare (Emmet Kennedy, "Taste and Revolution," *Canadian Journal of History*, 32 (1997), December 1997 <<http://www.usask.ca/history/cjh/kenned97.htm>>). Jacques-Marie Boutet de Monvel's *Les Victimes cloitrées* (1791), Marie Joseph Chénier's *Fénelon* (1793), two very popular dramas, and of course, Diderot's famous novel *La Religieuse* (1796) demonstrate the theme's popularity. These plays, as Summers says, "were all written with a purpose, definitely a bad purpose" (p.192).

what extent this was so, or why it should be thus. In fact, the motif she describes was widespread in literature and this chapter seeks to explore its popular appeal.

We have noted how Burke turned Catholicism into a ‘romantic’ cause in the 1790s. But in fact in various ways and in various media from the very beginning of the century, Catholicism had been inspiring the sentimental, and the pious. Furthermore as I will show the aesthetics of Catholicism had long been a source of spiritual inspiration for non-Catholics. My aim in demonstrating this is to obscure critical insistence that Catholicism appealed only to repel, that Protestant writers evoked Catholicism only to highlight the falsity of Catholic sensibility.

In his *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (1756), Joseph Warton, struck by Pope’s description of a high mass in *Eloisa to Abelard*, admits to being spiritually moved by the Catholic liturgy: “I believe few persons have ever been present at the celebrating a mass in a good choir, but have been extremely affected with awe, if not with devotion.”¹ Bellenger shows that by the late century Catholic chapels in London had been for quite a while attracting huge audiences from outside the Catholic ‘faithful’ (p.444). The Warwick Street Chapel and the Portuguese Chapel which had an impressive choir, were particularly favoured (p.445).² The performativity of the mass undeniably appealed to the sentimental imagination. An onlooker of Wartonesque sensibilities would have no doubt taken pleasure in the drama and passion of the Latin Mass.³ James E. Wellington argues there is “little room for doubt that in the Eighteenth-century English mind the liturgy of the Roman Church often inspired the same “pleasing astonishment” which Addison associated with mountains and spacious landscapes.”⁴ For example the travel-writer Joseph Shaw records how his senses were ‘ravished’ by the sights and sounds of the Mass at the Church of Our Lady in Antwerp:

Having my eyes, wherever they wandered, surprised and dazzled with glorious pictures, admirable statues that seemed to speak, glittering lamps, shining altars, bright crucifixes, dazzling tabernacles, beautiful women, multitudes of burning tapers and priests clothed in the richest vestments; my smell pleased with frankincense and all the choicest perfumes; my ears charmed with the softest

¹ Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, 3d ed., (London: Dodsley, 1772), p.335.

² The arrival of the French clergy enhanced what seems to have been an established interest in the musicality of the Roman liturgy: for example the French clergy introduced the singing of Vespers to England (M. Haile and E. Bonney, *Life and Letters of John Lingard, 1771-1851* (London, 1912), p.59).

³ Warton, pointing the “alluring” nature of Catholic ritual, tells of Lord Bolingbroke who, whilst watching the archbishop of Paris “elevate the host” in the chapel of Versailles, whispered “If I were King of France, I would always perform this ceremony myself” (Warton, p.336).

⁴ James. E. Wellington, introduction, *Eloisa to Abelard* by Alexander Pope with the *Letters of Heloise to Abelard* in the version by John Hughes, ed. James E. Wellington, (USA: University of Miami Press, 1965), p.52. Further references to Pope’s *Eloisa to Abelard* will be to this edition.

mournfullest music on the best instruments and tenderest voices on earth. Having thus every sense about me ravished and surprised, I found myself just sinking, my soul itself almost dissolved, had like to have left me fainting without sense or thought, quite transported and in doubt if I were on earth.¹

This is an enthusiastically graphic description of Catholic worship. The statuary, rendered ‘realistically’ in the Catholic church, with pleading eyes and bleeding limbs, seems to ‘speak’. There is an abundance of visual glamour, “beautiful women” included. There is a sexual edge to Shaw’s sensual pleasure. He portrays the Mass almost as a circus. And yet despite the carnivalization of Shaw’s description, and his (at first) entirely sensual appreciation of it (“Having my eyes...surprised and dazzled...my smell pleased...my ears charmed”) his experience is ultimately a mystical one: “my soul itself almost dissolved ... quite transported and in doubt if I were on earth.” In Shaw’s description it is difficult to discern where sensual enjoyment of the sentimental and performative and decorative possibilities of Catholicism ends and spirituality begins. This reaction tends to characterize sentimental responses to Catholic stimuli.

Catholic art attracted the patronage of the ‘sensible’. Guido Reni’s depictions of the patron saint of weeping, Mary Magdalen, her sackcloth drapery slipping tantalizingly to reveal a breast, her hand resting on a human skull, were remarkably popular. Because of Guido, ‘Magdalen’ became a common term used to describe a melancholy and/or penitent female: a usage which increased as the century progressed.² In 1744 a letter to the *Gentleman’s Magazine* testifies to an established trend for “popish” female attire – cowls, crosses, rosaries - amongst Anglican church-going ladies.³ The writer does not attempt an explanation of this vogue for monastic dress which seems to have been all the rage - “our Churches [are] crowded with Capuchins, Pelerins, &c.”, says the correspondent - but it is possible that it was linked to the popularity of the Guido Magdalen, as well as to monastic themes in popular literary works, to be discussed next.

Clearly, Guido’s Magdalen was not appropriated as a straightforward religious icon. Guido’s Magdalen was for her English fans primarily a sentimental icon and she was appropriated by the cult of sensibility because the emotional state she embodies - melancholy – had become modish. And yet I suggest where Catholic materials are appropriated as

¹ Joseph Shaw, *Letters to a Nobleman from a Gentleman Travelling through Holland, Flanders and France* (1700), (London, 1709) p.59-60; cited in van Strien, p.497.

² The famous hostel for fallen women set up in London in 1758, named The Magdalen Hospital, termed its inmates ‘magdalens’. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Ann Radcliffe describes Emily as having “the contour of a Madona, with the sensibility of a Magdalen” (Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), ed. Bonamy Dobrée (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.184).

³ *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 14th March 1744, p.149-150.

'fashionable' in the eighteenth century, their value as such being often linked to their sentimental appeal, it is often difficult to discern between modishness and some level of ideological/emotional sympathy - as we can see from the wearing of Catholic symbols of devotion by Anglican women at prayer. Can we say where opportunism ended and active use of the cross, cowl and rosary as aids to prayer began in this context? Certainly the author of the letter could not: he sounds a note of caution thereon, warning, in a tone between humorousness and sincerity, that Church and the State "will be endangered by these Innovations."

When critics speak of the sentimentalization of Catholicism in the eighteenth century they tend to speak in terms of an astuteness on the part of Protestant writers and antiquarians, of their shrewd usage of Catholic culture as a fashion accessory. McWhir notes that Walpole "who could refer to Catholicism as "Superstition's papal gloom," also wrote...that the beauty of King's College Chapel made him "long to be a monk in it"" (McWhir, p.37), and she sees "a clear division here between religious and aesthetic motives". Yet, in what seems to be a modification of that claim, McWhir goes on to argue that "the aesthetic motive has the power to reverse for a moment strongly held religious prejudice" (p.37). She notes, in other words, that a sentimental response to the 'beauties' of Catholicism in Walpole invites a moment of ideological sympathy - I argue, even of embryonic spiritual response.

It is more useful to approach popular attitudes to Roman Catholicism as a set of attitudes and interests that can be both opportunistic and spiritual. A Gothic writer who demonstrates this dynamic between consumption and genuine spirituality is William Beckford. Antiquarians and Gothicists such as Walpole and Beckford delighted in the appropriation of the Catholic 'style', and their fascination helped make Catholic aesthetics, particularly its architecture, fashionable. However for Beckford, antiquarian interest went along with a certain amount of experimentation with Catholic forms of faith.

"It is no accident at all that Gothic fiction first emerged and established itself within the British and Anglo-Irish middle class" argues Baldick, "in a society which had through generations of warfare, political scares, and popular martyrology persuaded itself that its hard-won liberties could at any moment be snatched from it by papal tyranny" (p.14). I want to contest such claims by drawing attention to the sentimental and romanticized representations of 'papism' in the literature from which the Gothic novel emerged and established itself. By suggesting that cultural and literary approaches to Catholicism in this century form a grey area with porous boundaries, I hope to draw our eyes away from the monolithic interpretations offered by Gothic's critics.

The Cloister Theme

“...Father!” continued he, throwing himself at the friar’s feet, and pressing his hand to his lips with eagerness, while agitation for a moment choked his voice; “father!” continued he in faltering accents, “I am a woman!” (p.81).

When Matthew Lewis’ femme fatale Matilda reveals the fact that she is not, as the reader has been led to believe up until this point, a novice monk, but a young woman obsessed with the abbot, she is not exposing (as many critics would have us believe) the inventiveness of the young author’s sexual imagination,¹ so much as his investment in French literature. For the scene of Matilda’s unveiling is a clever reworking of the denouement of the hugely popular sentimental novelette, *Mémoires du comte de Comminge* by Claudine-Alexandrine de Tencin, which was included in her romantic work *Malheurs de l’Amour*. In the novel, the faithful Adélaïde lives disguised as a Trappist monk just to be near her beloved Comminge, to whom she reveals her true identity on her deathbed. The difference between Tencin’s heroine and Lewis’ Matilda is that the former reveals herself not as part of some (literally) diabolical temptation, but in order to confess to the monks, and to God, her failings as a ‘religious’, the inappropriate nature of her dealings with the divinity:²

Oui, mon Dieu! C’était pour lui que je vous priais, c’était pour lui que je versais des larmes, c’était son intérêt qui m’amenait à vous. Vous eûtes pitié de ma faiblesse, ma prière toute insuffisante, toute profane qu’elle était encore ne fut pas rejetée (p.92).

Mémoires du comte de Comminge (1735) was a significant contribution to a sentimental literary trend which had emerged in France in the 17th century. R. Shackleton broadly termed

¹ For a discussion of this scene in terms of Lewis’ “interests in sexuality” see Elizabeth R. Napier, *The Failure of Gothic, Problems of Disjunction in an Eighteenth-century Literary Form*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). See especially Tuite. See also Tiziana Sabbadini on the erotic and sensational power of the revelation and concealment scenes in “The Monk of M.G.Lewis and the Expectation of Veiling”, *Il Lettore di Provincia* 15, (1984), pp.69-73. Watt notes “the homosexual connotation of the crossdressing motif by which Matilda is disguised as Rosario” (p.90). Jerrold Hogle speaks of “Ambrosio’s brief homosexual attraction to Matilda as Rosario and the way it recurs “in the depths” when he sees the “beautiful” adolescent Lucifer” (Hogle, Jerrold E. “The Ghost of the Counterfeit—and the Closet—in The Monk.” *Romanticism On the Net* 8 [November 1997] <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat0385/ghost.html>) See also Tompkins’ reading of the gender implications of the scene (*Romantic Novel*, p.116).

² Claudine-Alexandrine de Tencin, *Mémoires du comte de Comminge* (1735) (Paris: Les Éditions Desjonquères, 1985), pp.88-93. “Yes Lord! It was on his behalf that I beseeched You, it was for him that my tears were shed, it was in his interests that I was drawn to You. You pitied my weakness, my unacceptable prayer, all the more profane because it was accepted by You” (my translation).

this literary trend the ‘cloister theme’.¹ The recurring features of the cloister theme are: a) a cloistral setting (a monastery or convent) and b) a monastic hero and/or heroine who has suffered in love and enters the convent or monastery to master or subdue his/her passion. Despite the fact that the cloister theme tends to accommodate a story of the struggle between physical passion and spiritual faith, it appealed to writers of various political and philosophical persuasions, not just to sentimentalists of the *ancien regime*. It was used by those aligned with the *philosophes* to illustrate the virtue of indulging the natural passions (Shackleton, p.184). It was used by the Jacobins to endorse the anti-clerical movement under the Revolution.

It is the latter usage that critics have focused on in their analysis of the Gothic novel, because, as I have stated, *The Monk* employs certain violent tropes that found popularity on the Revolutionary stage, such as the live burial of nuns. But although this link is a strong one, the influence of the anticlerical dramas of the *Théâtre monaçal* on the Gothic may have been overemphasized. For, as I have shown in my exposition of the scene from *Comminge*, Lewis does not confine himself to copying scenes from anti-clerical texts. It is injudicious then to attribute Gothic’s major monastic conventions to the Revolutionary stage when other sources clearly exist.

The Cloister Theme in France

The following remarks describe the cloister theme as it appeared in French seventeenth-century literature and show how it was imitated and developed by later French and English writers. This is a theme that is important to the Gothic mode but has only been discussed in terms of negative representations of Roman Catholicism. My aim is to show how the theme appeared in English literature as a vehicle for a benevolent evocation of Catholicism, and how this representation was developed by Gothic writers.

There are two primary manifestations of the cloister theme in seventeenth-century French literature, as identified by Shackleton. Both can be linked to the Gothic novel’s monastic conventions. The most famous is the Abélard and Héloïse story. The original Abélard and Héloïse letters were published in the Latin text in 1616. In 1669, a fictional work by Vicomte de Gabriel Joseph de Lavergne Guilleragues, *Lettres portugaises*, was published to immediate acclaim. It was ostensibly a translation into French of five love letters written

¹ R. Shackleton, “The Cloister Theme in French Preromanticism” in *The French Mind: Studies in Honour of Gustave Ridler*, ed. Will Moore, Rhoda Sutherland and Enid Starkie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), pp.170-187.

by a nun cloistered in a provincial Portuguese convent, to a French officer who had loved and left her.¹ Six years after the publication of *Lettres portugaises* a friend of Guilleragues, Roger De Bussy-Rabutin (1618-1693) saw the potential for a new translation of the letters of Abélard and Héloïse. Bussy-Rabutin, as Shackleton says initiated a "literary vogue" which lasted in France for nearly four centuries.

From the popularity of Rabutin's version and the proliferation of translations and adaptations that followed (Shackleton, p.175), it is obvious that the letters held great appeal for the *ancien regime*. The character of Héloïse in particular fascinated the French reading public.² In her letters she displays the great intellect, piety and passion for which she had already gained a reputation in legend,³ in a voice that is fresh, urgent and immediate. Through time and translation, Héloïse imposed herself once more on the French imagination.

France's cult of Héloïse was enhanced by the publication of Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard* in 1717 (Shackleton, ps.181,183). His epistle is modelled on the Ovidian *Heroides*, "heroic" poetic treatments of situations involving important figures. Pope's choice of literary form shows that he considered the religious life of Héloïse a theme worthy of the highest poetic and romantic treatment.⁴ Perhaps only a Roman Catholic poet, and one of Pope's standing, could have had the vision not to mention the audacity to elevate a French nun to the pantheon of great classical lovers alongside Penelope, Medea, Dido, Phaedra.

Eloisa's struggle, however, is not that of the classical women abandoned by their lovers: it is not simply a lover's 'complaint'. Eloisa's struggle is between spiritual and physical passion. It replicates, in Pope's own words from the *Argument*, the "picture of the struggles of grace and nature, virtue and passion" in the letters. This struggle is unique to a heroine in the heroic epistle tradition. As Wellington says, "The problem of the religious life introduces into Pope's poem an element of spiritual commitment largely absent from the epistles of Ovid" (p.35). A. Franklin Parks shows how different Eloisa is as a heroine from Pope's Sappho,⁵ who is torn between passion and bitterness; and even from the Heloise of the Hughes translation of the letters who "demonstrates traits that are traceable to the traditional

¹ Guilleragues' Portuguese nun was popular in England, too. In 1678, *Lettres portugaises* was translated into English by Sir Roger Estrange under the title *Five Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier*. There were at least twelve editions of the translation by 1716. *Five Letters* was also versified in heroic epistle form as *Love without Affectation* by an anonymous poet in 1709 (Wellington, p.29).

² See *Héloïse dans l'histoire et dans la légende* by C. Charrier (Paris, 1933).

³ Héloïse had achieved notoriety as a woman of remarkable intellect before she met Pierre Abélard. At a word from him she cloistered herself forever from the world and went on to win an "almost legendary reputation for piety" as the Abbess of the Paraclete (Wellington, p.15).

⁴ The subject was partially selected by Pope because of his acquaintance with John Hughes who published an English translation of the letters of Abélard and Héloïse in 1713.

⁵ In *Sappho to Phaon*.

dilemma when she chides Abelard for abandoning her.”¹ This element of spiritual commitment is pronounced a defining feature of *Eloisa* by Warton in his *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*.

Later critics such as Wellington and Francis Beauchesne Thornton² treat the poem as a distinct product of a Catholic imagination. At the moment when Pope describes Eloisa’s “extatic trance” - the most mystical part of the poem, according to Wellington (p.53) - he presents her as a “visionary maid” straight out of Catholic hagiography: “While prostrate here in humble grief I lie,/ Kind, virtuous drops just gath'ring in my eye,/While praying, trembling, in the dust I roll, / And dawning grace is op'ning on my soul” (lines 277-280). At times Pope recalls, as Parkes rightly stresses, Richard Crashaw, the prominent poet of the English Catholic Baroque,³ describing the lachrymose, ecstatic penance of Mary Magdalen.⁴ The “blazing pietism” of the piece, says Thornton, is evidence of Pope’s “sentimental and devotional...allegiance to the Roman Church”. Indeed, Pope’s representation of conventuality - as contrasted to Eloisa’s personal chaos of livid desire and searing spiritual frustration - is both mystical and sentimental: “How happy is the blameless vestal's lot! /The world forgetting, by the world forgot./Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind! Each pray'r accepted, and each wish resign'd.....To sounds of heavenly harps she dies away,/And melts in visions of eternal day!” (lines 207-222). The picture, says Thornton, is “the work of a painter who knew his subject and loved the poetry of Crashaw” (p.47). Pope’s poetic sentimental representation of the mystical life of the cloistered nun was unique certainly to English literature. I would argue that Pope’s poem romanticized the spiritual experience of the Catholic nun: from now on it would be possible for the mystical dimension of the conventual experience to be treated in sentimental terms. That is not to say that Eloisa became a sort of Catholic apologist in literature – rather that, after Eloisa, images of the convent could be viewed sympathetically as part of a sentimental reading.

There was a long series of French translations of Pope’s heroic epistle,⁵ the most popular being that of Jean-Pierre Colardeau (1758). His imitation of Pope, *Lettre d'Héloïse à Abailard*, became one of the most famous poems of the eighteenth century and established

¹ A. Franklin Parks, “Pope’s *Eloisa to Abelard*: Spirituality and Time”

<www.frostburg.edu/dept/engl/Parks14.html>

² Francis Beauchesne Thornton, *Alexander Pope: Catholic Poet*, (New York: Pellegrini and Cudahy, 1952).

³ For more on Pope’s similarity to Crashaw see Thornton p.44.

⁴ For more on the themes of Crashaw see Alison Shell, “Catholic Poetics and the Protestant Canon”, *Catholicism, Controversy, and the English literary imagination, 1558-1660* (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.56-107.

⁵ Shackleton cites E. Audra, *Les Traductions françaises de Pope (1717-1825)*, *Étude de bibliographie*, Paris, 1931.

the classical heroide form in French Literature.¹ In prose, too, Pope's *Eloisa* made her mark. The title of Rousseau's most famous novel was inspired, notes J. S. Spink, by a reading of Colardeau's poem.²

The revolutionary years saw a new wave of interest in the old Abélard and Héloïse theme. Novelists wrote sentimental versions, such as *Héloïse et Abeilard* by Loaisel de Tréogate (1803). The cult of Héloïse was sustained most famously in the work of François-René de Chateaubriand. Héloïse prompted the creation of Chateaubriand's famous nun Amélie in *René* (1802), and in *Le Génie du christianisme* (1802) the theme of her religious life is extolled as surpassing in poetic beauty the death of Dido.³ In the second half of the century some thirty editions of old or new adaptations of the letters of Abélard and Héloïse were printed (Shackleton, p.181).

At the outset of the chapter I suggested that the cloister theme, a French literary phenomenon, had two key manifestations. The Abélard and Héloïse story – to which we shall return – forms one. The other originates with the story of the founder of La Trappe.⁴ The mid eighteenth-century cult of *sensibilité* made a sentimental icon out of Rancé, the abbot of the monastery of La Trappe. There are two likely reasons for this unlikely idolisation. Rancé cut a romantic figure: it was well-known that his monastic vocation was inspired by a broken heart. And his writings illustrating the pious devotions, deaths and sorrows of some of the younger monks of La Trappe were of huge sentimental appeal. La Trappe itself became a popular tourist attraction. Indeed, Tompkins points to a poem of George Keate's entitled *Sketches from Nature* (1779) which reflects the fact that La Trappe also "captured English imaginations" (Tompkins, p.99, note 15). A contributing factor to the popularity of the monastery of La Trappe and its associations may well have been de Tencin's 1735 novel *Comminge*, which she chose to set there.⁵

¹ Colardeau's heroide was reprinted 13 times up to 1825 and appeared in many collections.

² J.S. Spink, "The Social Background of Saint-Preux and d'Étange", *French Studies*, 30, (1976): pp.153-69.

³ François-René de Chateaubriand, *Génie du christianisme, ou Beautés de la religion chrétienne* (1802); *The Beauties of Christianity*, tr. Frederick Shoberl, Vol. I, Ch.5, pp.106 -111.

⁴ The worldly Rancé (born in 1626) became Canon of Notre Dame de Paris, Abbot of La Trappe, and of several other places, by inheritance. But it was not until the death of his mistress in 1662 that he turned to the religious life in earnest. He became abbot of his own La Trappe and replaced its regimen of prayer and study with a more strictly penitential interpretation of St. Benedict's Rule. He wrote several spiritual books. For this the order was widely criticized.

⁵ Tencin had first-hand experience of conventualism. Like all girls of her social class, she joined the royal convent of Montfleury at the age of eight and was forced by her father to take the veil. She complied, but felt she had no calling, and so was determined not to take her final vows. When the time came, with the assistance of an ecclesiastic with whom she was in love, Tencin arranged for a notary to enter the convent and denounce her final vows. This recapitulation would demonstrate to the Church that she was not qualified to be a nun.

The plot of de Tencin's novel is important to this study as it reappears in the Gothic novel and in many English works which anticipate the Gothic. Comminge and his cousin Adélaïde are thwarted in love by a family feud. Comminge is locked up by his father in order to keep him away from Adélaïde. Adélaïde, hoping to pacify the father of Comminge, marries someone else. Accordingly, with Adélaïde safely married and out of the way, Comminge's father frees his son, who immediately seeks Adélaïde at her marital home. Misfortune ensues, and Comminge ends up duelling with and seriously wounding Adélaïde's husband. Comminge flees, joins the Trappists and embrace a penitential life and Adélaïde is locked away by her husband. One day, Comminge is called to witness the death of a fellow monk who makes a surprising confession – the monk is Adélaïde. She tells her story. On the death of her husband she was released from captivity by a servant who informed her that Comminge was dead. She decided to enter the convent where she was educated as a girl. However stopping on the way to the convent in a church, she heard a beloved voice singing plainsong: it was Comminge. Too afraid to disturb his pious existence, yet unable to live without him, Adélaïde decided to join the order and live disguised the life of a Trappist. For years she battled with her spiritual conscience and her passion: although she yearned to make herself known to Comminge, she was unwilling to distract him from his vocation. One day she saw that he, too, was still mourning her. She felt that God was paying back her deception by making Comminge suffer; and so she prayed for the grace to find a genuine religious vocation for herself, in order to obtain relief for Comminge. When her prayer was granted, she felt at last “la paix d'une âme qui est avec vous et qui ne cherche que vous” (p.92).¹ But Adélaïde's conversion is short-lived and she dies a few days later.

De Tencin took the basic story of two thwarted lovers retiring to the monastery and set it in La Trappe, thus uniting two already popular sentimental motifs. The result was to have huge implications for the monastic theme in literature. *Comminge* was hugely successful: its setting and its sublime, tragic *denouement* set the tone for future treatments of the theme, treatments that are clearly identifiable as early predecessors of the Gothic mode such as François-Thomas-Marie de Baculard d'Arnaud's drama *Les amants malheureux; ou, Le comte de Comminge* (1768).² *Les amants malheureux* is set in the subterranean vaults of

However she did not physically escape the convent until 1712. This story was the subject of enduring gossip in France: Tencin even became known as *la nonne défroquée*.

¹ “The peace of the soul that resides with You and looks for nothing but You” (my translation).

² The huge success of *Comminge* ensured that it had many imitators. Claude-Joseph Dorat (1734-1780; Dorat wrote an *heroïde*, in the style of Pope's *Eloisa*), Louis-Marcelin de Fontanes (1757-1821) and the Duc de La Vallière successfully adapted or reworked the *Comminge* story. The woman-posing-as-monk trope was used by Dubois-Fontenelle in *Effects of the Passions, or Memoirs of Floricourt* which comprised “a fine anthology of

La Trappe where crosses and skulls decorate open graves, and the tomb of Rancé itself is on the stage (from which the ghost of Rancé later appears). The result is a *locus classicus* of the Gothic. The sentimental religiosity of de Tencin's novel challenges the anti-Catholicism of Arnaud's earlier work *Coligny ou la Saint-Barthélemy* (1744) which was resurrected alongside the anticlerical dramas of the Revolution. As well as a setting for stories describing Catholic atrocities, the cloister had with De Tencin become firmly established as a site of romance and pathos.

The Cloister Theme in England

Early Gothic pieces in English literature can be found in unexpected places. In English letters, a piece that was likely to have had a large readership is the little cloister tale published in the *Spectator* in 1711, *Theodosius and Constantia*.¹ *Theodosius and Constantia* is a delightful reworking of the Abélard and Héloïse story, and appears frequently as a narrative trope in the Gothic novel. *Lusignan, or The Abbaye of La Trappe* (Anon, 1801), *The Monk of the Grotto* (Anon, 1802) and Radcliffe's *Sicilian Romance* (1790) all retell this tender tale. To find a cloister tale in a publication such as the *Spectator* is something of a surprise. We cannot be sure whether Addison wrote the piece himself or translated it from the French but whether the piece is an original Addisonian short story or a translation the *Spectator* is still an unlikely home for it. Addison, a leading Enlightenment figure, was generally opposed to all of the principles of the Catholic Church. Yet this tale effectively romanticizes the taking of monastic vows.² It is also retold by Addison in the spirit of piety: the tale is printed in response to a letter from a lady who has had her heart broken, and the message of the tale is that only religion can remedy the pain of disappointed love. The promotion of piety over sensibility is a trope we will see recurring in late eighteenth-century texts. But it seems that it was something of a popular sentimental theme for the Augustans, too: one of the main themes of Richard Steele's *Guardian* (1713) is the necessity for a true gentleman not to be "cold to the Beauty of Holiness".³

monastic horrors" (Joyce M.S. Tompkins, "The Gothic Romance" (1932), *The Gothick Novel, A Casebook*, ed. Victor Sage (London: Macmillan, 1990) p.92).

¹ 164, Friday September 7th, 1711. The readership of the *Spectator* was large - between 2,000 and 4,000 copies a week were sold during the years 1711 to 1714.

² See Addison on enthusiasm in the *Spectator*, no. 201, 20th October 1711.

³ "I promise myself to see the Day when it shall be as much the Fashion among Men of Politeness to admire a Rapture of St. Paul, as any fine Expression in Virgil or Horace; and to see a well-dressed young Man produce an Evangelist out of his Pocket, and be no more out of Countenance than if it were a Classick Printed by Elzevir" (*The Guardian*, April 4, 1713).

Theodosius and Constantia are sweethearts caught in a family feud. Constantia's father arranges her marriage to another man, to keep the two lovers apart and Theodosius, heartbroken, disappears. Constantia, faced with "no relief but in her devotions and exercises of religion" resolves to take the veil (Constantia's vocation is not pious but melancholy in origin, as was that of Héloïse). At the convent she makes her confession to a "celebrated father.. very much renowned for his piety and exemplary life" who turns out to be Theodosius (now Father Francis). Unwittingly Constantia pours out her feelings of guilt for Theodosius, whom she assumes to be dead. Father Francis realizes who she is. He weeps at her "unparalleled fidelity", and absolves her from her sins. The following day he advises her to "Go on cheerfully in the glorious course you have undertaken, and you will quickly find such a peace and satisfaction in your mind which it is not in the power of the world to give." Constantia's heart is so elevated by her discourse with Father Francis that she takes the veil. It is only then that Father Francis reveals his identity to her. Constantia and Theodosius write to each other for the rest of their lives and Constantia's last request (the final nod to Abélard and Héloïse) is that they be buried in the same grave. The tone of the piece is optimistic, not tragic. Addison's cloister tale has an Augustan lightness unfamiliar to similar subjects after Pope who - in tribute to Milton's *Il Penseroso*, critics claim¹ - 'gothicized' the convent/monastery: Pope's dismal cloister elaborates on a gloominess only hinted at in the Hughes letters.²

The success of Pope's poem cannot be overstated. After Pope's death his depiction of the passionate suffering of Eloisa is habitually cited as the measure of his power and consequently, his rank as a poet.³ References to Pope as "sad Eloisa's Bard"⁴ are

¹ E. Audra argues that *Eloisa to Abelard* serves as a transitional point between Milton and the graveyard school. Pope's melancholy setting is generally considered to be a combination of Miltonic and Addisonian reference (E. Audra, "Les Traductions françaises de Pope (1717-1825)", *Étude de bibliographie*, Paris, 1931). In Milton's *Il Penseroso*, the "studious cloister's pale" gives the poet pause to consider his own mortality. Addison writes of the "Awefulness" of a ruined abbey, which he describes, giving full weight to its eerie and melancholy attributes (in *The Spectator*, 110, July 6th 1711). However, at least one Catholic writer of the counter-reformation also recognized the elegaic potential of the monastic cell. James Shirley extols the virtue of "a melancholly Cell, The patterne of a graue" and "the sad chyming of the sacring bell" in *The Gratefull Servant* published in 1637. A trope that would later be used to derogate Catholicism or to arouse a melancholy sensibility, is used by Shirley to define the rigours, the 'sublime' challenges, of monasticism.

² For a discussion of Pope as the first to write in the Gothic voice see Anne Williams, *Art of darkness : a poetics of Gothic* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1995).

³ See William Thompson, *On Mr. Pope's Works. Written soon after his Death, in Poems on Several Occasions* (Oxford, 1757); Anna Laetitia Aiken, *The Origin of Song-Writing in The Works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld* (London, 1825); Thomas Blacklock, *On the Death of Mr. Pope. An Elegy in Poems by the Late Reverend Dr. Thomas Blacklock* (Edinburgh, 1793); Rev. Mr. Thompson, *A Character of Mr. Pope's Writings in A Collection of Poems in Six Volumes*, ed. Robert Dodsley (London, 1763).

⁴ Edward Moxon, *Sonnet XI, in Sonnets by Edward Moxon* (London, 1830-1835).

commonplace.¹ Pope's *Eloisa* pervaded popular literature as a sentimental heroine of potency and stature. "Eloisa's fires" and "Eloisa's flame" are persistently referred to in sentimental poetry as the benchmark of true passion well into the nineteenth century. On stage, if a character reads or has read *Eloisa to Abelard* s/he is assumed to be in possession of a warm and sensible heart – much as an appreciation of landscape in the novels of Ann Radcliffe indicates a refined sensibility. As a trope, this lasted at least into the late century.² However it should be noted that the poem's spirituality was considered a significant aid to the poem's success: Warton finds "sublime" *Eloisa's* vision of the Paraclete "where Pope's religion certainly aided his fancy."³ Of Pope's representation of the mysticism of conventualism,⁴ Warton writes, "What a judicious and poetical use hath POPE here made of the opinions of the mystics and quietists... True poetry, after all, cannot well subsist, at least is never so striking, without a tincture of enthusiasm" (p.331). Samuel Johnson praises Pope's "papistical machinery."⁵ Whereas today the tendency is to focus on the celebration of sexual love in the text, contemporary readers responded to the mystical nature of *Eloisa* as well as the erotic. *Eloisa's* Catholic spirituality, her mystic personality, was part of her virtue as a sentimental heroine. Interest in *Eloisa's* spirituality can be detected in the 'replies' to Pope's epistle, of which there were many. In James Cawthorn's 1746 *Abelard to Eloisa*⁶ which was separately collected with Pope's poem twice, in 1805 and 1818, there is in *Abelard's* insistence that his wife fulfill her religious duties a replication of Pope's mystical representation of the nun's experience:

O let thy soul the sacred charge attend,
Their warmths inspirit, and their virtues mend:
Teach every breast from every hymn to steal
The cherub's meekness, and the seraph's zeal;
To rise to rapture, to dissolve away
In dreams of heav'n, and lead thyself the way;
Till all the glories of the blest abode,
Blaze on the scene, and every thought is God.
While thus thy exemplary cares prevail,

¹ See for example Matthew Pilkington, *To Mira, with the Miscellaneous Works of Mr. Pope*, from *Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1731).

² "Enter Rosa, reading./'Canst thou forget what tears that moment fell,/When warm in youth, I bade the world farewell?/As with cold lips I kiss'd the sacred veil,/The shrines all trembled, and the lamps grew pale.'/Poor *Eloisa* in her cloister spoke my sense. I begin / to repent my elopement. My lady abbess has ere / this discovered it. I wonder if lord Winlove has / received my letter. I hope it did not miss him. I / wish he was come!" J. O'Keefe, *Fontainbleau; or, Our Way in France. A Comic Opera, in Three Acts* (Dublin, 1785), Act 1, scene II.

³ Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (London, 1772) p.328.

⁴ In the stanza beginning "How happy is the blameless vestal's lot!"

⁵ Cited in Wellington, p.53.

⁶ James Cawthorn, *Abelard to Eloisa in Poems, by the Rev. Mr. Cawthorn* (London, 1771).

And make each vestal spotless as her veil,
Th' eternal spirit o'er thy cell shall move
In the soft image of the mystic dove;
The longest gleams of heavenly comfort bring,
Peace in his smile, and healing on his wing... (lines 267-280).

The poem is full of imagery that evokes the martyrs and mystics of Catholic hagiography: the mystic dove, the seraph and cherub (Teresa of Avila is often depicted in art with a seraph), and the ecstatic vision of the saint or mystic whose ambition to “dissolve away /In dreams of heav'n”. From this Anglican clergyman’s elaboration of Pope’s spiritual theme, we can see how Pope’s poem helped to make possible the romanticization or sentimentalization of Catholic mysticism. And the date of this work is notable: critics such as Robert Geary privilege the neo-classical period’s poetic use of the monastic or religious setting to evoke a sense of melancholy with “no link to any system of belief ”, or as a link to a hierarchy of vaguely Christian dogmas centering on the conventional theme of *memento mori*.¹ But the popularity and imitation of Pope’s cloistral setting as a place of Catholic mysticism suggests that the neo-classical poetic use of the monastic theme is less easy to categorize than that.

In his 1754 poem *Father Francis and Sister Constance*, George Jeffreys elaborated with pious Christian sentiment and Catholic symbolism Addison’s *Theodosius and Constantia*. Jeffreys tells us in a footnote that he has turned into verse and enlarged Addison’s original. Enlarged is an accurate term. While the poem follows the plot of Addison’s tale closely, it is much more sentimental about monasticism:

Thus, bent to travel for eternal day,
She chose a Convent, as the nearest way;
Where contemplation, free from care and noise,
In holy solitude the Soul employs,
To learn Heavn’s laws, and antedate its joys;
To clear and fix our intellectual eye,
And wind devotion up to ecstasy (lines 137-143).

It may be of interest to speculate about whether or not Jeffreys was a Catholic, as critics have wondered about Eleanor Sleath, a Gothic novelist who also romanticizes conventual piety to an extreme degree (see chapter 4). But I suggest that it is more useful to recognize merely that such representations of Catholicism were *possible* in 1754. That sentimental poets in the mid-century were presenting sympathetic and highly sentimental views of the Catholic

¹ Geary, p.18.

contemplative life complicates assumptions about “British and Enlightenment dread of medievalism, superstition, and uninformed prejudice” (Hoeveler, p.52). Let us look at the extremes to which Jeffrey’s takes Addison’s representation. Firstly Jeffreys gilds the picture of monastic life, insisting on the absolute and sublime sanctity, as he sees it, of monastic devotion. Theodosius is “by Heav’n inspir’d” to join the monastery (line 164) where, like Constance, his soul becomes “Exalted on the wings of heav’nly love.” Constance’s prayer for the strength to purge herself of the sin of loving Theodosius and causing his death is much more sacramental in character than Addison’s – indeed is hymn-like. Compare Addison’s:

"My behaviour.....has, I fear, been the death of a man who had no other fault but that of loving me too much. Heaven only knows how dear he was to me whilst he lived, and how bitter the remembrance of him has been to me since his death." She here paused, and lifted up her eyes that streamed with tears towards the father..

to Jeffreys’:

...--ah! Father, aid me here!
Is there a way on earth to wash me clear?
What shall I do to see the throne of Grace,
And Mercy shining in my Maker’s face?
By daily Penance will I purge my stain,
And pray, and weep, and fast, and pray again..
Such is the thorny path to joys above;
But can I share ‘em with my perish’d Love? (lines 222-232)

Jeffreys also presents mortification as a ‘romantic’ trait, making his stoic Theodore lavishly and dramatically penitential: “Thus, low and grov’ling on the ground, adore, /With heart as humble, Heaven’s chastising pow’r./How happy had I been, if curs’d alone!” (lines 281-283). But at one point Jeffrey deviates completely from Addison and in so doing creates a moment that recalls the conventions of medieval devotional poetry. Theodosius has a dream in which Constance appears to him in two modes. First she appears as herself, throwing off her nun’s veil with abandon and embracing him. Then she appears as a nun/angel: “through the Veil, before her radiant Face,/A stream of glory, and angelic grace...Improv’d *her* beauty, and refin’d *his* flame..” (lines 366-369). Suddenly a whole saintly choir appears around her, heralding the couple’s “Nuptial tie”, and with that they both ascend to heaven. Theodosius’ dream-vision evokes certain medieval works – *Pearl* for example - in which flamboyant mystical visions of a loved one residing in a dazzling kingdom of Heaven point the good Christian to accept a life of pious resignation in order to earn the glories that will follow.

Because this poem is so suggestive of medieval poetic themes it might be useful to link it with the mid-century revival of interest in medieval texts, and particularly in the revival of interest in chivalry (whose origination we tend to associate with Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, over ten years later). Certainly, a chivalric mood emerges in the poem. Theodosius encourages Constance to take the veil, and when it is too late for her to turn back, reveals his identity to her explaining that their romance should be offered to God and so become something higher, purer, greater:

...to succeed to passion pure and true,
As your has prov'd to Me, and mine to You,
Where could it be but to our Maker, due? (sic) (lines 425-427).

Constantia applauds the mercy of God and as in the original, the two communicate as friends by letter for the rest of their days, like Abélard and Héloïse, cementing the medieval orientation of the piece. This poem highlights the complexity of Catholic/monastic representations by eighteenth-century writers dealing in the themes later appropriated by the Gothic writers. As I will explain, Radcliffe's Cornelia is a type of Constantia. She too is reunited with her ex-lover, Angelo, in the confessional, where she has "but one crime to deplore, and that was the too tender remembrance of him for whom I mourned, and whose idea impressed upon my heart, made it a blemished offering to God": at which her father-confessor sobs uncontrollably and reveals his identity.

The popular poet Edward Jerningham (1737-1812) wrote a poetic response to Pope's *Eloisa*¹ as well as several popular cloister poems which illustrate the ambiguity and the diversity in the treatment of these monastic themes that inspired the Gothic. Jerningham was widely read. His *Poems on Various Subjects* (1767) had nine printings, the latest dated 1806. It is very likely that the Gothic writers read Jerningham, whose acquaintances included Hannah More, William Cowper and Horace Walpole. Jerningham was a Catholic, but his cloister poems reflect the complexity and ambivalence of his changing religious beliefs.² In *The Nunnery* (1762?) and *The Nun; or, Adaleida to her Friend* (1764) there are strong echoes of Pope's *Eloisa*, and the name Adaleida in both betrays the influence of *Comminge*. *The*

¹ Edward Jerningham, *Abelard to Eloisa* (?) collected in *Poems and Plays, by Mr. Jerningham* (London, 1806).

² Jerningham allegedly converted to Protestantism later in life. However, Anna Seward refers to him as a Roman Catholic in her note to his 1764 poem *The Nun*: see her poem *To The Memory of Lady Millar* in vol. II of *The Poetical Works of Anna Seward*, edited by Walter Scott, III, (Edinburgh: London, 1810).

*Nunnery*¹ is an exercise in melancholy, reminiscent of the graveyard school and those poems which Geary categorizes as employing the religious setting to evoke a sense of melancholy only.² Here, a young monk Edward mourns the death of his beloved Adaleida, a nun. *The*

¹ Edward Jerningham, *The nunnery: an elegy. In imitation of the Elegy in a church-yard* (London, Printed for R. and J. Dodsley, 1762?)

² In Thomas Warton's *The Pleasures of Melancholy* Eloisa is invoked as a kind of goddess of gloom. Similarly in Jerningham's poem the figure of the nun is a cipher of (unspecified) sorrows:

Now pants the night-breeze thro' the darken'd air,
And Silence sooths the vestal world to rest,
Save where some pale-ey'd novice (rapt in pray'r)
Heaves a deep moan, and smites her guiltless breast.

Within those ancient walls with moss o'erspread,
Where Grief and Innocence their vigils keep,
Each in her humble cell till midnight laid,
The gentle daughters of Devotion sleep. (lines 1-8)

The 'prayer' in which 'some pale-ey'd novice' is 'rapt' seemingly has little sacramental designation. Rather it gives the impression that the nun is simply programmed, through ignorance or something more sinister, to 'smite' herself and 'moan'. The whiff of masochism with respect to the convent and monastery is not uncommon in eighteenth century literature. In a poem by George Keate entitled *Ancient and Modern Rome, A Poem* (1755) monasticism is the perennial symbol of Catholic ignorance and zeal (George Keate, *Ancient and Modern Rome, A Poem* (1755) *The Poetical Works* [London: 1781]). The poet rejects spiritual mortification: "Heav'n/ Points out a flow'ry way to all, nor bids its sons tread the hard flint, or shun the joys of life" (lines 339-341), and he especially focuses on nuns, or more specifically on women who become nuns. He does not have the same attitude to monks: indeed, in a later poem called *The Ruins of Netley Abbey*, Keate actually displays a considerable amount of nostalgic respect for the "pious beadsman" of Netley, reinforcing Summers' assertion that Netley and other such "hallowed homes" had become popular places of excursion (Summers, p.197). In this poem however the speaker describes a female taking the veil in most unfavourable terms. He delights in describing the wreckage of the novice's physical charms:

Before the mitred priest
She kneels submissive; on the sacred floor
Casting those eyes, whose fires were sure design'd
To light the torch of Venus, and provoke
To am'rous parley; other office now
Destin'd to serve!--Who can unmov'd behold
Such sacrifice!--Yet 'tis her choice, and lo!
She sings consenting!--lo, the prelate cuts

Her graceful hair! ...

The stripping of 'Laura's' femininity is described in entirely sexual terms ("those eyes, whose fires were sure design'd /To light the torch of Venus") and it would not be misleading, I think, to read an expression of fury directed towards women who choose not to have sex:

Self banish'd, self condemn'd, now to thy cell,
Too rigid maid, retire, and deck it round
With bones, and skulls, torn from the ravag'd grave,
To point a gloomy moral. (lines 380-414)

His address to 'Laura' becomes a misogynistic attack on paragonic virtue which brings to mind Lewis' (extravagant) masochistic treatment of Antonia in *The Monk*, and the fatal assaults on enthusiastic virtue in the novels of sensibility (consider for example the devastation of Clarissa, Madame de Tourvel, Virginia). There is a tendency for authors to read enthusiastic virtue as frigidity and thus make a misogynistic correlation between it and the rigour of death. The cloister setting lends itself particularly well to the misrepresentation of chaste

Nun, reminiscent of Pope in tone if not in elegance (“Does some angelic lonely-whisp'ring voice, / Some sacred impulse, or some dream divine, / Applaud the dictates of thy early choice?--- / Approach with confidence the awful shrine” [lines 13-16]), includes some strong criticism of monasticism. However Jerningham’s use of the cloister theme cannot be easily categorized as indicative of precisely one thing or another. His acclaimed 1771 poem *The Funeral of Arabert, Monk of La Trappe* is a pious and sentimental rendition of *Comminge*.¹ Jerningham best represents the variations in treatments of these monastic themes. His work demonstrates the ambiguity of ideological focus inherent in the treatment of these themes by the eighteenth-century writer. Jerningham can be both polemical and highly sentimental about monks, nuns and monastic practices in his evocation of the cloister theme. We see this duality recurring in the Gothic novel. In *The Nun of St. Omer* (1802) for example, Charlotte Dacre’s heroine Cazire (the eponymous nun) is spellbound on first seeing the convent to which her father has sent her against her wishes:

“Oh!” I exclaimed to my companion, “if that were but the Convent.”

“That *is* the Convent of St. Omer,” answered Jean.

We continued drawing near - a strain of melodious harmony rose on the sullen air; the solemn organ sent forth its melodious sound, and a tone of celestial softness, that seemed calculated to *search the soul*, first stole gently on the bosom of the swelling gale; till, gradually rising to the full chorus of harmony, it sunk again ...²

Dacre presents the convent as a haven of celestial beauty, as Sleath does in *The Orphan of the Rhine*, a novel we will discuss in terms of the romanticization of Catholicism. Next however

women as unnatural and cadaverous. Keate’s ‘Laura’, with her taste for graverobbing, is more ghoulish than girl. This sort of image finds its way into the Gothic: for example, Lewis’s Agnes cradling her maggoty baby in the tomb (*The Monk*, p.412). In this misogynistic and voyeuristic use of the cloister, Keate feeds directly into the lasciviousness of what Tompkins describes as the “nunnery-tale book” tradition in France (works of the mid-century which were as a rule scandalously indecent [see Tompkins, *Gothic Romance*, p.93]), and anticipates the literature of the French Revolution. A later English Jacobin poet Robert Merry wrote a poem which, like Keate’s, uses the cloister theme to synthesise anti-Catholic and misogynistic rhetoric. Merry’s poem *The Pains of Memory* is a nod to Warton’s *Pleasures of Melancholy*, but whereas Warton conjures Eloisa as the muse of sweet melancholy, Merry uses the figure of the nun in an unnerving way - religious rite evokes an atmosphere of morbid eroticism, even necrophilia.

¹ Edward Jerningham, *Poems* (London, 1786). It seems likely that Jerningham had seen Arnaud’s *Les amants malheureux* on one of his many trips to Paris where he enjoyed seeing the latest plays (he would have been able to understand the French, thanks to his Jesuit education at Douai), for a French critic noted the similarity to Arnaud’s work. *The Funeral of Arabert, Monk of La Trappe* was immediately translated into French and formed part of the French translation by Le Tourneur of the popular *Meditations and Contemplations of James Hervey*. Jerningham’s poem, says the translator Peyron, displays the “touché originale et sombre” of Arnaud - and indeed it does: “ The solemn edifice was wrapt around / In midnight darkness, and in peace profound: / A solitary lamp, with languid light, / Serv'd not to chase, but to disclose the night; / Serv'd to disclose (the source of all her pains) / The tomb that gap'd for Arabert's remains:..” (lines 3-8).

² Charlotte Dacre, *Confessions of The Nun of St. Omer A Tale*, 1805 (New York: Arno Press, 1972), p.59.

Dacre's tone becomes critical as she describes what she/Cazire sees as the aim of the convent: "where the misery of the moment, seeking to be ameliorated, is entailed forever; whence the unfortunate victim, *misanthropied* by long and repented seclusion, endeavours with luring colors to attract the unwearied fool who sports without" (p.60). The celestial "melodious harmony" is now a siren's song, calling the unwitting to join the sorry victims of religion in their "repented seclusion". Then within a few lines, having given no indication that the nuns are "misanthropied by long and repented seclusion" nor that the Convent is a mournful place of spartan horrors, Cazire "[begins] to think the monastery of St. Omer (although I was compelled thither) might be a charming place; and to wish I had been led by choice rather than coercion" (p.61-62). This juxtaposition of opposing perspectives is not uncommon in the Gothic nor in poetry that treats monasticism, as we have seen. Duality of this nature needs to be recognised in discussions of a genre's supposed religious bias, and equally when discussing the religious bias of a culture and its history.

So far the discussion of the cloister theme has focused upon the character of the Gothic nun. I have argued that early examples of this character were inspired by the historical figure of Héloïse and became a fixture of the English poetic imagination. We should not however ignore the figure of the monk. Pierre Abélard (1079-1142) seems the most likely archetype for the monk in French and English literature in the eighteenth century. His passion for Héloïse, subdued by years of penance and piety in a monastery, identifies him as the key personality in the development of the early prototypes, figures such as Addison's Theodosius and de Tencin's Comminge, who are compelled by personal circumstance of a passionate nature to take monastic vows. The poet and playwright Claude-Joseph Dorat in 1769 wrote that Abélard's misfortunes "ont ouvert une source de larmes qui ne se fermera jamais dans tous les cœurs sensibles."¹ It seems likely that Abélard's popularity in the 'sensible' age, which was shaping itself in response to the progress of science and reason, was only helped by his eminence in the field of logic: by the fact that he compromised, quite spectacularly, his hard-won status as a prominent man of reason by enslaving himself to passion then prostrating himself to religion. The sentimentalisation of the letters in verse by Beauchamp, Dorat, Mercier, Feutry, and Saurin in the eighteenth century² attest to the fascination of the

¹ Claude Joseph Dorat, *Collection d'héroïdes et pieces fugitives*, (Leipzig, 1796), Vol. II. p.95.

² Collected in *Lettres et épîtres amoureuses d'Héloïse, avec les réponses d'Abelard, traduites librement en vers et en prose par MM. De Bussy, de Beauchamps, Pope, Colardeau, Dorat, Feutry, Mercier etc.*, ed. Cailleau (Paris 1777).

sentimental imagination with Abélard's transition from a defiant, arrogant man torn between theology and love, to aspiring saint.¹

The figure of Theodosius in the *Spectator* shows that an 'Abélardian' type was already in existence in English letters by the time Hughes produced his bowdlerized English translation of the letters of Abélard and Héloïse in 1713. Hughes' translation included Abélard's own *Historia Calamitatum* entitled *Abelard to Philintus*. Hughes' translation inspired Pope to write his poetic *heroïde* on Héloïse and, as Wellington says, the two "enjoyed a tremendous vogue in England during the eighteenth century and were frequently published together....along with numerous replies to *Eloisa* from poetic "Abelards" (several of them women) of the pre-Romantic age" (Wellington, p.24). Through Pope, Abelard became a subject of sentimental verse in England. William Pattison's *Abelard to Eloisa* (1728) and James Cawthorn's popular 1746 poem of the same name are just two examples of Abelard's manifestation as English sentimental muse. Cawthorn and Pattison respectively, demonstrate the different imaginative constructions of Abelard's experience in English poetry, and the variances within the representation of monasticism. Some poets concentrate on Abelard's application to sacred duty, while others portray him as an eternally wounded, sorrowing lover with little or no vocation. Pattison's poem is an example of the latter: Abelard is overwhelmed by passion for Eloisa ("A thousand jarring Thoughts my Bosom tear, /For Thou, not God, my *Eloise* art there", lines 27-28). He invokes the power of the monastery to quash his pain ("O Vows! O Convents! Your stern Force impart,/And frown the melting Phantom from my Heart", lines 59-60); he begs for relief by divine grace: ""Let springing Grace, fair Faith and Hope remove, /The fatal Traces of voluptuous Love" (lines 71-72). But finally, giving up on himself, he prays only for the relief of his wife's grief. Cawthorn's Abelard is an example of the former: he has a much stronger sense of God, and his mystic visions draw him back from musing on Eloisa:

What means this pause, this agonizing start,
This glimpse of heav'n quick rushing thro' my heart?
Methinks I see a radiant cross display'd-
A wounded Saviour bleeds along the shade:
Around th'expiring God bright angels fly,
Swell the loud hymn, and open all the sky.

¹ In 1779 a sentimental memorial (in Latin) was erected by the incumbent abbess of the Paraclete, recording the romantic legend of Abelard and Heloise's shared trials in love. That the convent felt obliged to provide a loving memorial seven centuries after the event, indicates the sway of the cult of *sensibilité* during this period, with its fascination for this cloistral tale of clandestine love and repentance. By 1779, Colardeau's imitation of Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard* was one of the most popular poems in France).

O save me, save me, ere the thunders roll,
And hell's black caverns swallow up my soul.
(lines 79-86)

Again, with the use of such medieval iconography (“a radiant cross”, “bright angels”, “hell’s black caverns”) and spirituality, described in the quickening of Abelard’s passionate relationship with the ‘wounded Saviour’ (“This glimpse of heav’n quick rushing through my heart”); and his soliciting of Eloisa to help herself through piety to a release from the bondage of his memory and, like Dante’s Beatrice, raise him alongside her to glory (“Lift me from earth and give me to the sky;/Let my lost soul thy brighter virtues feel,/Warm’d with all thy hopes, and wing’s with all thy zeal”, lines 296-298), it is possible to link this poem to the mid-century revival of interest in medievalism. Abelard and Heloise were without doubt symbols of the medieval revival. For example, in 1746 when Cawthorn’s poem was published, monastic houses had become popular tourist attractions, particularly for English poets and writers, and Gray described the Grande Chartreuse in Turin thus: “...not a precipice, not a torrent, not a cliff, but is pregnant with religion and poetry... You may believe Abelard and Heloise were not forgot upon this occasion.”¹ A year after Cawthorn’s poem Walpole began Gothic construction work on the seventeenth-century house that was to become Strawberry Hill, and one of his projects therein was to build a cloistered hall which he called the Paraclete.²

I suggest that we recognize the types of poems discussed in this chapter - what I will loosely categorize as ‘Abelard and Eloisa’ poems - particularly the types that engage medieval devotional motifs such as Jeffrey’s *Father Francis and Sister Constance*, as part of the fashionable mid-century interest in medievalism and its themes. To include poems which express emotional sympathy with Catholicism in this context renders complicated established notions of this revivalist phenomenon. What is widely perceived as a purely scholarly/antiquarian movement may not have been so unambiguously defined in its day. The medieval revival’s fetishization of Catholic aesthetics - in literature, in the architecture that

¹ *Letters*, Vol. I, p.44 -45. Gray was so moved by the “religion” of the landscape surrounding the monastery “that would awe an atheist into belief, without the help of other argument” that he wrote an ode in the Album of the Fathers, which the monks greatly prized (p.89)

² In a letter to Horace Mann on April 27th 1753 Walpole writes “I was going to tell you that my house is so monastic, that I have a little hall decked with long saints in lean arched windows, and with taper columns, which we call the Paraclete, in memory of Eloisa’s cloister” (*Letters*, Vol. 2, p.161). In a later letter, he refers to Abelard in terms of his being an inspiration to the aesthetics at Strawberry (to George Montagu, May 17, 1763) “I have filled Mr Bentley’s Gothic lanthorn with painted glass, which casts the most venerable gloom on the stairs that was seen since the days of Abelard” (*Letters*, Vol. 4, p.275-276). Ironically, Strawberry Hill now houses St. Mary’s College, the oldest Catholic College in England.

followed Strawberry Hall's institution as a hugely popular tourist attraction, and in the interest in chivalry - is generally read by critics as straightforwardly consumerist. Tuite argues that during this period "the culture of Catholicism was marked by a kind of antiquarian charge, and occupied the status of a curiosity as an object of connoisseurship and a kind of accoutrement - all of which enabled appropriation by practitioners of the Gothic" (ibid.). Whitlark claims that Catholicism acquired a "fascinating quaintness" in the 1790s that "underlay the vogue of Gothic" (ibid.). However in works of eighteenth-century poetry and literature in which monastic vows are treated as a source of pathos - works which can clearly be associated with objectification of Catholic culture - and in the many cultural appropriations of Catholic materials, it is not always obvious that Catholicism is simply an accoutrement as, through sentimentality and emotionality, the boundaries become blurred.

Beckford's relationship with Catholicism is just such an ambiguous case. By the second half of the eighteenth century, as Girouard notes, "there was a sizeable group of country gentlemen with antiquarian tastes, or antiquarians with friends among the gentry, all busy studying the Middle Ages, publishing the results of their researches and building Gothic buildings" (*The Return to Camelot*, p.21). In 1796, in keeping with the fashion of the times, Beckford began work on Fonthill Abbey. Unlike Walpole's little hall which had kindled the rage for such architectural ventures, Beckford's abbey was oversized and hugely dramatic, recalling the European grandeur of the Catholicism of England's feudal Anglo-Norman past. As well as countless relics, statues and stained-glass images of saints brought from Mediterranean monasteries and churches, Fonthill was equipped with a dark crimson and gold Oratory, its altar adorned with gilt candelabra and an alabaster St. Anthony of Padua. Scornful of the vulgarity of Protestant iconography (see Sage, p.18), Beckford seemed to delight in the elaboration of Catholic culture. Clearly the performativity of the Catholic church inspired his tastes: his letters and writings record many occasions when, during his travels in Portugal and Italy, he sits for hours deeply involved with the "the drama and suffering of the Mass".¹ Soon Beckford's religious sympathies were being questioned. The Italian and Portuguese Catholic hierarchy itself, Kiely notes, thought him always on the verge of conversion (p.49).² Locally suspicion was aroused by his chapel at Fonthill which he had dedicated himself to his "patron" Saint Anthony (of whom there was also a large statue at the entrance to the great hall). Beckford answered that although he may have been seen at Mass -

¹ H.A.N. Brockman, *The Caliph of Fonthill* (London, 1956), p.48.

² Beckford himself wittily remarks "there is no conversation in Lisbon but of my piety. Really this joke begins to have its inconveniences", *The Journal of William Beckford in Portugal and Spain*, ed. Boyd Alexander (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), p.81.

‘performing’ he quips ‘upon this theatre’ (the Fonthill Oratory?) - he would describe himself as “an Amateur, a Dilettante, a Connoisseur...but no Professor” of Catholicism.¹ However, as his contemporaries clearly found, it is hard to distinguish between an ‘amateur’ and an affiliate. Sage notes cautiously that Beckford was “psychologically appreciative of Catholic ritual” (*Gothick Novel*, p.18): but where does psychological appreciation end and spiritual response begin?

And it is this negotiation of territory within attitudes towards Catholicism – within the representations that I am arguing underpin the Gothic, and in particular within the Gothic novel itself - to which I want to call attention. There are many writers in the eighteenth century who appropriate Catholic culture and aesthetics, who seem to be testing out the broad ground between Catholicism as fashionable motif and Catholicism as genuine spiritual territory. I now want to look briefly at two examples of this sentimental appropriation of Catholicism.

It has been suggested that Daniel Defoe’s positive depiction of a “French ecclesiastic” in *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) was offered in the spirit of religious tolerance - seventeen years earlier he had been jailed for indirectly criticizing the Anglican Church with the publication of an ironical pamphlet entitled *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*. Clearly, Defoe does seem to be engaging the Enlightenment principle of tolerance: but his sentimental depiction of the monk as ‘heroic’ missionary and defender of the true Christian faith suggests that more is at stake than that.² In the novel, the monk’s main concern is with the colonists who have fathered children with native women before Crusoe arrived without any formalities, leaving the women and children vulnerable to abandonment. Crusoe is “so dull”, he imagines in the first instance that the monk wants to separate the families, but he actually wants to marry them and procure written contracts that “compel the man and woman at all times to own and acknowledge each other”.³ Crusoe is staggered:

I was amazed to see so much true piety, and so much sincerity of zeal, besides the

¹ Cited in Brockman, p.91.

² Jesuit missionaries became a target of satire in English letters from about the middle of the century onwards. By the mid-eighteenth century the Society of Jesus had grown rapidly in strength and number - its influence had reached Abyssinia, India, China and other areas of the non-Western world. The appearance of anti-Jesuit material (such as Henry Fielding’s comedy *The Old Debauchees or the Jesuit Caught* (London, 1732), *Chrysal or the Adventures of a Guinea* by Charles Johnstone (1760) and the anonymous *The Adventure of a Jesuit* (1771)) might be taken as confirmation that the success of this mission, whose founder demanded from his followers and converts a return to the strictest and most uncompromising obedience to the authority of the Catholic Church and its ecclesiastical hierarchy, was, if not a threat, then at least a provocation, to the Protestant status quo.

³ Daniel Defoe, *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, ed., George A. Aitken, (London, 1895), ps. 127, 126

unusual impartiality in his discourse, as to his own party or church, and such true warmth for the preserving people that he had no knowledge of or relation to; I say, for preserving them from transgressing the laws of God; the like of which I had indeed not met with anywhere (p.128).

In fact, the Benedictine's "true warmth for the preserving people" draws Crusoe back to an understanding of essential Christianity:

I could hold no longer. I took him in my arms and embraced him with an excess of passion. 'How far,' said I to him, 'have I been from understanding the most essential part of a Christian, viz., to love the interest of the Christian Church, and the good of other men's souls! I scarce have known what belongs to a Christian.' –"Oh, sir, do not say so," replied he; "this thing is not your fault." –"No," says I; "but why did I never lay it to heart as well as you?" (p.129).

The monk sees such work as an honour "worth venturing all I had in the world for" (p.131-132). He cannot understand why Crusoe does not want to undertake the conversion of the islanders: "an occasion of doing good, which is really worth the expense of a man's whole life" (p.130).

I discovered a kind of rapture in his face while he spoke this to me; his eyes sparkled like fire, his face glowed, and his colour came and went as if he had been falling into fits; in a word, he was fired with the joy of being embarked in such a work (p.132).

The very thought of the task throws the monk into an ecstasy, which shows like the first flush of love or amorous desire, upon his face. A man who would "give Christ and the Blessed Virgin thanks all my days" for allowing him to sacrifice them to converting thirty seven "savage slaves" (as Crusoe sees them, p.131), seems the model of true and amazing Christianity to Crusoe. Defoe uses a Catholic monk to illustrate how obscured an understanding of "the essential part of a Christian" has become to Crusoe. Clearly there is an exploration taking place in this episode of Catholicism as genuine spiritual territory. Defoe is presenting the Benedictine's belief system as sympathetic - because, importantly, it represents the fundamental principles of Christianity: a theme we will see recurring in the Gothic.

My second example is Laurence Sterne's mid-century treatment of a Franciscan monk in *A Sentimental Journey* (1768). This work bears evidence of the author's changing attitude towards Roman Catholicism. By 1768 Sterne had travelled in Europe and met some members

of the Roman church and as a result had developed, as Gardner Stout notes, a cosmopolitan benevolence.¹ The novel also bears witness to the popularity of the Abelardian character, for Sterne describes a monk who joined the monastery having suffered “a disappointment in the tenderest of passions” and resolving to find sanctuary, “not so much in the convent as *in himself*”.² Yorick meets the monk at the beginning of his ‘sentimental’ journey, in Calais. Lorenzo approaches, begging box in hand and Yorick resolves “not to give him a single sous”. But he regrets it: “I have his figure this moment before my eyes, and think there was that in it which deserved better (p.9-10).” Yorick finds Father Lorenzo’s expression incongruous on the face of a Catholic monk. Lorenzo recalls Guido’s transcendent saints:

It was one of those heads which Guido has often painted - mild, pale - penetrating, free from all common-place ideas of fat contented ignorance looking downwards upon the earth - it looked forwards; but looked, as if it looked at something beyond this world..How one of his order came by it, heaven above...best knows; but it would have suited a Bramin, and had I met it upon the plains of Indostan, I had revered it (p.11).

This last sentiment implies how far removed Yorick is, too, from an understanding of “the essential part of a Christian”. It is interesting that he immediately associates transcendence with geographical distance and the exotic, either because he has so rarely seen examples of transcendence in his native religion or because he needs to displace mysticism because it does not fit into his rational, enlightened view of the world. However when he does meet holiness close to home in Calais, the reality disturbs him. He cleverly puts the old man down, but his confidence is undone by the monk’s meek acceptance of rejection and immediately he is made “discontented with himself”:

The poor Franciscan made no reply; a hectic of a moment pass'd across his cheek, but could not tarry--Nature seemed to have done with her resentments in him; he shewed none--.....I reflected, I had no right over the poor Franciscan, but to deny him and that the punishment of that was enough to the disappointed, without the addition of unkind language--I considered his grey hairs--his courteous figure seem'd to re-enter and gently ask me what injury he had done me?--and why I could use him thus?—(p.17).

Sterne uses the Franciscan to call attention to Yorick’s bigotry and cynicism, which has

¹ Introduction, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy, by Mr. Yorick* by Laurence Sterne, ed. Gardner D. Stout, Jr. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

² Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy by Mr. Yorick*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed for T. Becket and P.A. Hondt, 1768), vol. I, p.59-60.

caused him not only to disrespect a harmless old man (wrong for humanitarian reasons) but willfully to misread poverty – which, after all, Jesus demanded – as “sloth and ignorance”. The generous and humble response of the monk to his display of prejudice is a revelation of how efficacious the monastic lifestyle *is* in its true purpose to render one more Christ-like. At the heart of both Sterne’s and Defoe’s portrayals is the unexpected implication that the monk recalls for the narrator a model of Christianity of which he has lost sight.

Yorick’s journey is very much one into selfconscious emotion. Yet once again, there is an ambiguity in the usage of the monk here. Sterne is not merely capitalizing on a popular sentimental motif for the purposes of mood or decoration. He is positioning himself somewhere between the usage of Catholicism as a sentimental tool, as an accessory, and the recognition of Catholicism as a spiritual discourse. Sterne’s audience seem to have found Lorenzo the monk a most engaging character, which again disputes readings of the anti-Catholic bias of the eighteenth-century reading public: Yorick’s exchange with the monk became a popular subject for prints. Moreover Sterne’s monk inspired a fashion accessory: friends would exchange snuff boxes in imitation of the monk’s parting gesture to Yorick.

The aim of this chapter was to revise our picture of the way writers in the eighteenth century treated Catholicism. Anti-Catholic sentiment is only one part of a larger construction notwithstanding the fact that it has been the focus of criticism for decades. The Gothic novelists of the 1790s constantly look back to the sentimental representations of Catholicism of the former age in their references to *Comminge* and the other works that constitute variations on the Abélard and Héloïse story. This aspect of Gothic plagiarism has been overlooked by critics who have focused on other appropriations and from those constructed a particular image of the Gothic as absolute in its religious iconoclasm.

My argument seeks out a different version of the Gothic. Socially and politically Catholicism was being viewed from a more sentimental perspective towards the end of the century. As a way of engaging with this upsurge in sentiment Gothic writers upheld the usage of sentimental Catholic motifs. In so doing, the position outlined above in which Catholicism is both modish and recognizable as spiritual territory is continually maintained by Gothicists. The non-canonical texts in the following chapters show this indisputably. However it is important to see whether this revisionist argument can be applied to the most canonical of Gothic texts, whose attitudes towards Catholicism have always been described as straightforwardly antagonistic.

CHAPTER 3

The Cloister Theme in The Monk and The Italian

The year that Beckford began Fonthill Abbey, Lewis published the first English Gothic novel in which the monastery became the subject of the plot. His intention, critics argue, was to satirize the Roman Church, to expose its hypocrisies¹ and attack its foundations. The French Revolution of course had the same intention.² *The Monk* famously begins with a depiction of a corrupt Spanish congregation, and goes on to show the pride, cruelty, ambition, lust and satanic villainy of the ‘holy’ Abbot of the Capuchins, Ambrosio – the idol of the Catholic community and the Capuchin brotherhood. The young hero Lorenzo – a “Protestant mouthpiece” - despairs of the gullibility and superstitious ignorance of those around him, and exposes the evil taking place in the convent, which is run by an Abbess as cruel as Ambrosio is corrupt. The narrative concludes with the Catholic congregation destroying the convent and slaughtering the Abbess. Ambrosio’s punishment, however, is reserved for Satan himself to mete out. Lewis might be seen to be constructing a narrative in which the Church is both the cause and the principal victim of revolution: built on anachronistic principles, lies and greed, the Roman Church deserves to be torn down by free-thinking modernists wielding the innocent oppressed as their instruments of destruction.

At the same time as Lewis was writing the novel however, nostalgia in England for the “gothic” (monkish, Catholic) past was growing. In 1791 Burke had claimed that Britain was more modern than France because it retained its monkish roots (“And after all with this Gothic and monkish education (for such it is in the ground work) we may put in our claim to as ample and as early a share in all the improvements in science, in arts, and in literature”). Chivalric values suddenly became important for members of the upper and middle classes, for whom the war with France begun in 1793 represented the war against the infidel: for, as Burke had said, “We know, and what is better we feel inwardly, that religion is the basis of civil society, and the source of all good and of all comfort” (p.75).

It is easy to see Lewis’ opposition to Whig conservative opinion as a characteristic of his role as figurehead of a literary movement bent on “carnivalizing [the] official ideology”

¹ See Ann Campbell, “Satire in *The Monk*: Exposure and Reformation”, *Romanticism on the Net*, 8 (November, 1997).

² *The Monk*’s association with the French Revolution goes back at least to the Marquis de Sade’s *Ideé sur les Romains* (Paris, 1878). In “Gothic Fiction and the French Revolution” Ronald Paulson argues that Lewis’ novel shares images with the Revolution (*ELH*, 48 (1981), pp. 532-554).

(Howard, p.4). However, any reading of Lewis as a radical, thumbing his nose at orthodox opinion is rendered problematic by evidence that as a writer he craved the approval of an orthodox audience. Jack G. Voller argues that Lewis “was in fact very much an “establishment” figure in many ways, eagerly cultivating the acquaintance of the nobility and the influential”, and as proof of his “desire for public acceptance and approbation”, points to the fact that Lewis himself bowdlerized *The Monk* for a subsequent edition in an attempt to silence some of the outcry from critics and readers.¹ He did something similar a decade later. In 1808 Lewis translated the infamous revolutionary monastic drama *Les Victimes cloîtrées*, which he retitled *Venoni, or The Novice of St. Mark's*. The ending, in which the characters applaud their own efforts to purge the Church of iniquity, was scorned by Lewis' first-night audience.² Lewis raced home and wrote a more sympathetic, pro-Catholic ending. In the final moments of his revised version the good Father Michael, having exposed the horror of oppression at St. Marks and rescued the beautiful and virtuous Josepha from the clutches of the evil Father Coelestina, declares that he will now retire “to some more virtuous fraternity.”³ The Viceroy cannot believe that Father Michael will venture back into the cloister, “after such experience/Of a Convent's interior”. But Father Michael replies:

Ah! Forbear, my Lord, nor brand
a whole profession with disgrace, because some few of
its professors have been faulty---'tis not the habit but the
heart, 'tis not the name he bears but the principles he
has imbibed, which make man the blessing or reproach
of human-nature.

Venoni.

---The good Friar says right, my friend---
then let us scorn to bow beneath the force of vulgar
prejudice, and fold to our hearts as brethren in one large
embrace men of all ranks, all faiths, and all professions.
The Monk and the Soldier, the Protestant and the Papist,
the Mendicant and the Prince, let us believe them all
alike to be virtuous till we know them to be criminal, and

¹ Jack G. Voller, “Matthew Gregory ‘Monk’ Lewis (1775-1818)” in *Gothic Writers a Critical and Bibliographical Guide*, ed. Douglass H. Thomson (Greenwood publishing Group, 2001), pp. 254 -261, p. 256.

² Monvel's original wording runs thus: “Venez, mes amis, courrons tous aux pieds des autels remercier le Dieu qui nous a réunis, ce Dieu de honté, qui permet que l'on épure enfin son culte des abus honteux qui le dégradent; ce Dieu qui pour mieux signaler sa justice permet quelquefois aux méchants le triomphe d'un jour; mais qui ne souffre pas que nous confondions dans nos jugemens sévères l'homme de bien, modèle des vertus, objets de nos respects et de l'honneur de la religion, avec le scélérat qui la trahit, mais sans jamais l'avalir” (Jacques-Marie Boutet de Monvel, *Les Victimes cloîtrées, drame en 4 acte [sic] et en prose*. (Paris, 1792) p.54). The victims are told to run quickly from the monastery and all its evils and calls upon God to punish wicked men (i.e. monastics) who dishonour Him.

³ Matthew Gregory Lewis, *Venoni, or The Novice of St. Mark's* (London, 1809), p.102.

engrave on our hearts, as the first and noblest rule of moral duty and of human justice, those blessed words,

----“BE TOLERANT!” (p.102-103)

Lewis’ instantaneous response to the demands of an audience who, by 1808, were impatient with anticlerical propaganda and anything that spoke, in revolutionary terms, of ‘purging’, is clearly opportunistic. His new dialogue exonerating the failings of the Roman Church (“Forbear, my Lord, nor brand/a whole profession with disgrace, because some few of/its professors have been faulty”), suggests that he was appealing to the new spirit of tolerance dipped in Burkean nostalgia for the old Church.

The Monk also seems interested in gaining acceptance amongst a readership with Burkean sympathies. This readership, I have suggested, was caught up in the general wave of sentiment for the Church and its allies in orthodoxy, the Catholics. Burke had portrayed the ideals of the patriotic Christian Englishman as being symbolically embodied in England’s Gothic monastic past: representations of that past, therefore, could be seen as supporting stability and order. Lewis must have been aware of this. He must also have been aware that a certain proportion of his readership would have been attracted by themes that romanticized and sentimentalized medieval monasticism: it seems unlikely that all readers of popular Gothic novels would have expected anti-clerical, anti-Catholic propaganda from them as scholarship suggests (see my introduction, p.10).

In many ways, Lewis’ treatment of the Catholic Church in the novel is as ambivalent as Beckford’s. James Whitlark has attempted to draw attention to the “unsatisfying” nature of the connections between Lewis’ text and “anti-Catholic polemics” (*Heresy Hunting*).¹ To add to the findings of Whitlark on the difficulties of reading *The Monk* as straightforward anti-Catholic polemic, I want to show that Lewis continually refers to Catholic cloister texts that had, by 1796, been romanticized many times over in verse and prose, and makes unsatirical use of Catholic doctrine. These two features, whilst not negating the moments of anti-

¹ He refers to Lewis’ use of primitive Christian supernatural elements such as the Wandering Jew and Satan which both contemporary and modern critics have agreed tend to endorse the credibility of faith in such things and work against the novel’s anti-clericalism and satire on the ignorance of Catholic superstition. Implicitly, claims Whitlark, “the book is Christian, since the devil makes such a point of tempting Ambrosio into renouncing Creator and Redeemer ...Other passages might be adduced as further evidence of the work’s Christianity, certainly including Agnes’s theological interpretation of her rescue: “O! Yes! Yes! Yes!’ cried the prisoner with an exulting shriek; ‘There is a God then, and a just one!’” Whitlark also notes that Lewis is equivocal in his representation of Catholic doctrine: for example, when Lewis on two occasions introduces the idea of purgatory with relation to ghosts, “although sounding like anti-Catholic satire, these passages establish a connection in the reader’s mind between ghosts and the Catholic doctrine of purgatory”.

Catholic satire, suggest that Lewis was *at the same time* drawing on the period's conservative ideology and perhaps even upholding the Church as a bastion of orthodoxy. This contradiction can be seen in the way he handles the 'revolutionary' mob scene in which the convent is burned down and the abbess slaughtered. Lorenzo is intent upon bringing to justice those in the convent whom he thinks have killed his sister Agnes, and arranges for the abbess to be exposed before a huge festival crowd. However he is horrified by the crowd's uncontrolled response to the allegations. He wants the abbess to be dealt with reasonably: "Lorenzo bade the people remember, that she had undergone no trial, and advised them to leave her punishment to the Inquisition" (p.343). But the mob fall on the abbess and tear her to pieces. Lorenzo is struck with "the utmost horror", and hearing that the mob intends to do the same to every nun in the convent, "resolved to defend it if possible" (p.344). Lewis implies that this is not the scenario that the free-thinker Lorenzo had assumed would result from enlightening the peasantry, and freeing them from their bonds of superstition: "Lorenzo was shocked at having been the cause, however innocent, of this frightful disturbance: he endeavoured to repair his fault by protecting the helpless inhabitants of the convent" (p.345). Lewis is portraying a calamitous situation in which the Church, perceived to be unjust, is torn down only to be replaced by something much worse. Lewis makes it clear that only a very few – four to be exact - of the nuns were actually bad: an emphasis which recalls the 'moral' of *Venoni* - "Forbear...nor brand/a whole profession with disgrace, because some few of/its professors have been faulty". In *The Monk* as in *Venoni* a decade later, Lewis implies that the Church is flawed but not all bad. Without it however primitive chaos reigns.

Let us look at some examples of where Lewis might have been attempting to engage a readership sympathetic to the Burkean idealization of the gothic past: and here is where Lewis' opportunism in this instance seems to be in evidence. I have identified that the much-discussed episode in which Rosario reveals himself to be a woman is in fact an imitation of the cloister-scene denouement of the famous sentimental novel *Mémoires du comte de Comminge*- a scene imitated by many English writers of sentiment. However in many scenes, Matilda and Ambrosio also imitate Abélard and Héloïse, the idols I have argued of the Gothic Revival.¹ Ambrosio's rhetorical skill in explaining "some abstruse parts of the sacred writings in a style that carried with it universal conviction" (p.45), as well as his pride and

¹ Lewis himself states that he got his first idea for his novel from a short tale, published in Steele's *Guardian* (1713) which tells of a middle-eastern hermit led by the devil into rape and murder and tricked into forfeiting his soul. *Santon Barsisa* serves as a skeletal blueprint for the second half of the Ambrosio narrative, the narrative of the seduction and murder of Antonia, but not for the (more fascinating) relationship between Ambrosio and Matilda.

arrogance on account of “the Enthusiasm which his discourse had excited” (p.64), establish him as an Abelardian figure. Interestingly, the moment which immediately precedes Ambrosio’s first meeting with Matilda in the narrative is very similar to the moment in Abélard’s *Historia* (which Lewis may well have read if he read the Hughes translation of the letters of Abélard and Héloïse with which it was published) just before he meets Héloïse. Once Matilda reveals herself to be a woman, the cowled couple start to resemble Abélard and Héloïse more explicitly. The dialogue between them recalls the relationship between the famous pair, either in overt motifs: “Your virtues shall be my example through life; and, when we expire, our bodies shall rest in the same grave” (p.84); or in the spirit of certain infamous arguments - Héloïse’s argument against marriage is echoed in Matilda’s plea to Ambrosio to allow her to remain in the monastery, for example (p.85). As Tuite notes, “[Ambrosio] pities [Matilda’s] suffering, he urges her to consider the impropriety of her presence in the Abbey, and he reminds her that suicide is the gravest of crimes” (ibid); in a similar vein, Abélard pities Héloïse’s grief and exhorts her to piety.

These scenes could of course be read as satirical: Lewis is imitating these monastic romances simply to expose them. But if so, the boundary between satire and sentiment is not clearly marked. These scenes work as straightforward romantic scenes. Indeed, the amount of scholarship devoted to ‘serious’ queer readings of the Matilda-unveiling scene demonstrates how effectively Lewis is performing as a sentimental writer here. I am arguing, then, that Lewis’ use of the cloister theme is in direct imitation of Pope’s and Addison’s usage and is drawing on that same sentimental tradition of appropriation of Catholic materials which made monastic themes modish from the early eighteenth century onwards. However with the huge success of Lewis’ novel, it is difficult not to see *The Monk* as rehabilitating these themes for a new audience: the readers of Gothic novels. After Lewis, cloister narratives became almost a requirement of the Gothic novel. The upsurge in Gothic novels with cloister themed titles in the years following the publication of Lewis’ novel demonstrates this.¹

¹ See for example this modest selection of titles from the Corvey collection: Ann Hamilton, *The Monk’s Daughter* (London, 1812); Miss C.D. Haynes, *Augustus and Adelina: or, The Monk of St. Barnardine*, (London, 1819); Louisa Sidney Stanhope, *The Nun of Santa Maria di Tindaro*, (London, 1818); Sarah Green, *The Carthusian Friar*, (London, 1814); Sarah Wilkinson, *The Convent of Grey Penitents or The Apostate Nun*, (London, 1810); Anon, *The Black Convent*, (London, 1819); Anon, *The Convent of Notre Dame*, (London, 1807); Anon, *The Convent of St. Michael*, (London, 1803); Anon, *The Sprite of the Nunnery*, (London, 1796); Anon, *Valombrosa or the Venetian Nun*, (London, 1805); Charles Howard, *The Convent of Saint Marc*, (London, 1808); W.H.Ireland, *Gondez, the Monk*, (London, 1805); Theodore Melville, *The Benevolent Monk*, (London, 1807), George Moore, *Theodosius de Zulvin, the Monk of Madrid*, (London, 1802); Owenson, *The Novice of St. Dominick*, (London, 1806), F.C.Patrick, *The Jesuit*, (Bath, 1799).

There is also a spiritual narrative within the tale of Ambrosio's decline and fall which renders problematic readings of *The Monk* as desacralized, profane, written to pervert an official ideology.¹ This narrative unfolds the progress of Ambrosio's spiritual despair. Lewis makes it clear at the outset of the novel that Ambrosio lacks compassion (pp.69-73), and that includes any compassion for himself. For, although as he begins to stray deeply into 'sin' he persuades himself "he always should have time sufficient for repentance" (p.270), once his degradation at the hands of Satan and the demon Matilda is complete he denies himself the comfort of turning to God for aid, for he believes absolutely that there can be no mercy for him. Ambrosio becomes characterized by despair. After he has raped Antonia, he can see only his own "despair of God's forgiveness" in her eyes (p.385). His despair overrides even his awareness of the law that states that every Catholic has the right to absolution: "For every other Sinner He thought there might be hope, but for him there could be none" (p.402).² Of course, the irony is that in the end, Ambrosio is pardoned by the Inquisition – God's mercy, if you like, is demonstrated. But it is too late for the monk. Lucifer has worked so powerfully upon his despair (p.435) that he has already signed over his soul. The novel's last reference to Ambrosio is to "the despairing monk" which, along with all the other references to what Napier calls Ambrosio's "excess of despair",³ indicates that Lewis is interested in characterizing Ambrosio as spiritually tormented rather than simply 'evil'. As a result, Ambrosio ends up being a much more complex character than, say, Radcliffe's Montoni or Marquis de Montalt - villains of one-dimensional 'wickedness'.⁴

What are we to imply from this? Obviously, Lewis' tone is not didactic, the novel does not overtly set up a moral about trust in the infinite mercy of God. But the very fact that

¹ See Geary, Chapter 4 "Desacralized Gothic: Lewis and Godwin", pp.59-81. Also Robert M. Polhemus, "Faith, Love and the Art of the Novel: 'The Feather Plucked from Cupid's Wing'", *Erotic Faith: Being in Love from Jane Austen to D.H.Lawrence*, (Chicago: London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp.20-25; Vijay Mishra, "The Gothic Sublime and Literary History: Beyond the Precursor Text", *The Gothic Sublime* (Albany: Albany University Press, 1994), pp.230-233; G.R. Thompson, "Supernatural Gothic: Gothic Fiction of the Romantic Age: Context and Mode", *Romantic Gothic Tales 1790-1840* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), pp.17-20. For examples of readings that concentrate on desire, sexuality and sexual deviancy, see Barry Doyle, "Freud and the Schizoid in Ambrosio: Determining Desire in *The Monk*", *Gothic Studies* 2,1 (2000), pp.61-69; Susan Caroline Duhig, "Romantic Pleasure, Gothic Pain, and Enlightenment Subjectivity", *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 54 (1994); Lisa Naomi Mulman, "Sexuality on the Surface: Catholicism and the Erotic Object in Lewis' *The Monk*", *Bucknell Review* 41:2 (1998), pp.98-110.

² "While Reason forced him to acknowledge a God's existence, Conscience made him doubt the infinity of his goodness. "Pardon?" he would cry in an access of phrensy: "Oh! There can be none for me!" (p.406).

³ Napier has noted the presence of this spiritual narrative: "Though at the end, pardon for Ambrosio is still theologically possible (God's mercy, as he knows, is infinite and 'the Penitent shall meet his forgiveness', and the arrival of the guards with his pardon symbolically suggests that this is true), the issue is complicated by..the excess of despair which he indulges in his prison cell" (Napier, p.114).

⁴ John Berryman sees Lewis' definition of the spiritual progress of Ambrosio as the author's most significant achievement (introduction to the Grove Press edition, p.13).

he has included this theological material in the narrative suggests that Lewis was attempting to place Ambrosio's story in a serious spiritual context. Critics who persist in reading the novel as desacralized – the founding novel of an entire desacralized mode of Gothic – seem to be willfully missing the point. Lewis' aim, as Berryman says, "is to conduct a remarkable man utterly to damnation", the surprise being "how *long* it takes – how *difficult* it is – to be certain of damnation" (p.13). Lewis' readership would have read this narrative as an interpretation of a standard Christian theme. Rather than viewing Lewis' novel as "wandering uneasily outside of any clear context of belief" (Geary, p.69) we should read it as being underpinned by the doctrines of the Church which it also, in places, satirizes. Again, this creates the impression that Lewis is in a sense upholding orthodox beliefs within this often satirical representation of the orthodoxy of 'venerable' establishments such as the Catholic Church.

Lewis was attacked for his satire by a press deeply sensitive to any criticism, however 'casual' or 'complacent', of Church and King (see introduction, p.12). And since then his use of the monastic past and other elements of 'conservative' tradition have been overlooked in favour of anti-Catholic polemic. As a result, the novel, the author and the tastes of his audience have been characterized as lying outside of orthodox territory when actually the case is more complex.

We can make the same case for Radcliffe in her final novel *The Italian or the Confessional of the Black Penitents* (1797). It is well known that Radcliffe wrote the novel in response to *The Monk*: she was alarmed by the satirical and prurient tenor of Lewis' work and by its implications for the Gothic mode with which her name was so closely associated. And so she wrote a novel, similar in setting and also featuring a monk as villain-hero, that she hoped would stand as a 'correction' of Lewis' work. By so doing, she made the figure of the monk even more popular as a Gothic trope.

What interests me particularly is that Radcliffe seems to be modifying her former critique of the Catholic Church in this novel. Again, my point is that there is much in this novel that complicates standard readings such as that of Robert Mighall who sees throughout *The Italian* the implication that "a state of law and order does exist, but against this the nobility and the Church stand fast" (p.25). In fact, I suggest, what Radcliffe implies is that the Church offers an *alternative* law and order to that of the state. Importantly she does not at any point openly attack the Church's ideology. Rather, her portrayal is ambiguous and this ambiguity sometimes gives the impression that she is upholding the Church as a mainstay of

justice and order.¹ One example is her portrayal of the Inquisition, as my introduction noted. Although the reader, along with Vivaldi, hears evidence to suggest the brutality of the Inquisition (the moans and cries of its prisoners in distant cells) what we actually *see* is a courtroom functioning in a way an English reader can recognize. As Sage says, “one judge, the inquisitor, [is] a harsh legalist; and one, his superior, the vicar-general, [is] a figure who displays a startling, almost an English, degree of humanity” (*Horror Fiction*, p.153). Radcliffe’s Dominican court has an honourable, fair disposition and practice which she allows even the Protestant defender Vivaldi to recognize: “Tears fell fast on Vivaldi’s cheek while he gazed upon his just judge, whose candour, had it been exerted in his cause, could not have excited more powerful sensations of esteem and admiration.”² Vivaldi’s empathy with “his just judge” collapses the scene’s initially carefully constructed atmosphere of dark horror.

Another example of this ambiguity of representation is the first scene in the novel in which some English tourists in the mid-eighteenth century are wandering with an Italian friend in the church of Santa Maria del Piato in Italy. Horrified to see an acknowledged assassin not only tolerated in the church, but entering a confessional, they are enlightened on the concept of sanctuary by a friar. The confessional becomes the focus of the scene:

The Englishman looked whither his friend pointed, and observed a confessional of oak, or some very dark wood, adjoining the wall, and remarked also, that it was the same, which the assassin had just entered. It consisted of three compartments, covered with a black canopy. In the central division was the chair of the confessor, elevated by several steps above the pavement of the church; and on either hand was a small closet, or box, with steps leading up to a grated partition, at which the penitent might kneel, and, concealed from observation, pour into the ear of the confessor, the consciousness of crimes that lay heavy on his heart.

‘You observe it?’ said the Italian.

‘I do’ replied the Englishman; ‘it is the same, which the assassin has passed into; and I think it one of the most gloomy spots I ever beheld; the view of it is enough to strike a criminal with despair!’

‘We, in Italy, are not so apt to despair’ replied the Italian smilingly (p.3).

Radcliffe’s precision in describing the confessional is the same she usually employs in descriptions of landscape for readers not familiar with foreign scenes: her portrayals educate

¹ Whitlark argues that Radcliffe’s works “had sufficient nostalgia for Catholicism to find almost as much religious inspiration in it as in nature, e.g., in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794): ‘As she listened, the mid night hymn of the monks rose softly from a chapel, that stood on one of the lower cliffs, an holy strain, that seemed to ascend through the silence of night to heaven, and her thoughts ascended with it.’” (*Heresy Hunting*).

² Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian or the Confessional of the Black Penitents* (1797), ed. Frederick Garber (London: Oxford University press, 1968), p.352.

and instruct her English readership. What they learn in this instance, apart from the dimensions and situation of a confessional, is that its gloomy interior represents for the Catholic liberation:

‘Do your altars, then, protect the murderer?’ said the Englishman.
‘He could find shelter no where else,’ answered the friar meekly.
‘This is astonishing!’ said the Englishman; ‘of what avail are your laws, if the most atrocious criminal may thus find shelter from them? But how does he contrive to exist here! He is, at least, in danger of being starved?’
‘Pardon me, ‘ replied the friar; ‘there are always people willing to assist those, who cannot assist themselves...’ (p.2).

The friar does not judge the assassin who has sought sanctuary at the altar, but acts upon the principle of impartial benevolence. Here - incomprehensible as it might seem to the Englishman – Church law dictates that penance obtains mercy, gloom offers hope and you “assist those who cannot assist themselves” regardless of their ‘sins’. Rarely for a Radcliffe novel, ‘foreignness’ is not being mocked here: it is an Italian who smiles benignly and composedly at an English gentleman’s ‘passion’. That the Englishman does not comprehend the mysteries of Catholic culture is ambivalently rather than appreciatively judged. What we see is a clash of cultures – each character permeated by his value system – but no comment offered by the authoress on which is legitimate. I would like to compare this episode to a similar episode in an anonymous Gothic tale published in 1792 in the *Lady’s Magazine*.¹ In this tale, the young hero Albert is offered sanctuary at a monastery, having murdered his evil rival Conrad in self-defence. However when the monks cannot protect Albert’s beloved Matilda from being recalled to her convent and into the hands of a nasty abbess, Albert sneers at the monastery and its ‘unnatural’ principles. His attack prompts the friar who saved him (and incidentally Matilda, earlier, from suicide) to defend monasteries and to remind him that he is currently benefiting from those principles. Without the Church’s doctrine of sanctuary, Albert would be in the hands of the law, which would deal with him much less mercifully. Albert regrets his rash words and apologises. In this tale, the concept of sanctuary is clearly validated – it saves the young hero who is of course reunited with Matilda. And when he turns out not to be a murderer after all we see how clearsighted the Church was to offer him sanctuary when a jury might already have condemned him. The Church’s ‘alternative’ laws uphold impartial benevolence, compassion and tolerance: virtues which in the 1790s it was

¹ *The Friar’s Tale*, 1792, *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, ed. Chris Baldick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp.12-23.

considered the responsibility of every reasonable man to embody. In this tale they are compared favourably to the laws of the state.

Radcliffe may well have read this tale. She does not make such a lucid statement but neither does she come down on the side of the Englishman in her debate on the value of sanctuary. Mighall argues that “if the reader identifies with the English tourist in this short introductory section then his or her sympathies are with the ‘honorary Protestants’ in the romance proper” (p.23). But the impression we get from the exchange is that identification with the English tourist suggests identification with a partial and limited sense of benevolence and a lesser capacity for mercy and tolerance than a Catholic friar: “‘Do your altars, then, protect the murderer?’ said the Englishman. ‘He could find shelter no where else,’ answered the friar meekly” (p.2).

The friar is an interesting character: meek and mild, and serene, in contrast to the spluttering English gentleman. In his lack of monastic gloom, the friar recalls Radcliffe’s description of a Capuchin whom she met in Bonn in 1794:

His shaven head and black garments formed a whimsical contrast to the character of his person and countenance, which bore no symptoms of sorrow, or penance, and were, indeed, animated by an air of cheerfulness and intelligence...¹

The friar strikes me as analogous to this happy Capuchin: and is, I suggest, a faintly more persuasive character than the Englishman. Once again, Radcliffe is setting up ambiguous comparisons between Catholic culture and Protestant, and more broadly between Church and state law, without pointing the superiority of either institution. This tendency to present a dual perspective is strong throughout the novel.

The monk Schedoni has a persuasiveness that is unexpected from a Radcliffian villain. Radcliffe seems to be attempting to follow Lewis in making her monk a rather more complicated – even tragic – villain than those in her earlier novels. Schedoni lectures the rationalist Vivaldi on susceptibility to superstition (“Does a monk call superstition weakness?” asks Vivaldi, once more astonished by the way the characters around him are not conforming to type), and finally appeals to the reader’s sympathy through a succession of penitential acts. For example, when Schedoni finds out that Ellena, his putative victim, is his daughter, Radcliffe allows him a ‘confessional’ moment in which he interprets events as forms of self-inflicted penance:

¹ Ann Radcliffe, *A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794* (London, 1795), p.125.

Schedoni, meanwhile, shut up in his chamber, was agitated by feeling of a very opposite nature. When their first excess was exhausted, and his mind was calm enough to reflect, the images that appeared on it struck him with solemn wonder. In pursuing Ellena at the criminal instigation of the Marchesa di Vivaldi, it appeared that he had been persecuting his own child; and in thus consenting to conspire against the innocent, he had in the event been only punishing the guilty, and preparing mortification for himself on the exact subject to which he had sacrificed his conscience. Every step that he had taken with a view of gratifying his ambition was retrograde, and while he had been wickedly intent to serve the Marchesa and himself, by preventing the marriage of Ellena and Vivaldi, he had been laboriously counteracting his own fortune.....Thus by a singular retribution, his own crimes had recoiled upon himself (p.242-243).

Penance is an obsession with Schedoni throughout the novel (the reader learns that, as the idol of the order of the Black Penitents, Schedoni's "voluntary sufferings are sufficient for a saint" (p.103)). However at this moment of its internalization - this is a gratifyingly quiet moment of inner revelation, of *mea culpa*, amid all the usual Gothic histrionics - penance is validated as an instrument of change and reformation. The realization that Schedoni has been "punishing the guilty" (himself), "preparing mortification for himself", preparing the "retribution" of his "own crimes" (note the layering of penitential reference) moves him to change his plans and mend the damage he has done. This process of penance on the part of the villain which brings about a change of character also works subtly on the sensibility of the reader until, by the time he dies, we are persuaded to feel a measure of compassion for him.¹ This implication marks a change in attitude from Radcliffe's earlier works in which the villain's death is an opportunity for the author to point out how much it is deserved.²

The interest that both Lewis and Radcliffe show in doctrines and theological states – penance, despair – evokes the preoccupation on a national scale with Christian virtue in the 1790s. Penance and despair are treated seriously as a source of pathos and horror in these novels: they are sublime states. Conservative rhetoric elevates the Christian faith and the accomplishments of the Church to such a level. Certainly the indeterminate position Radcliffe adopts when evoking Catholic/Church law seems concrete evidence of a response to conservative notions of support for the Church, past and present. Radcliffe – like Lewis –

¹ The reader is persuaded both by Father Ansaldo's pitiful of Schedoni's confession of some years ago ("The groans ..were those of a soul in agony, struggling with the consciousness of guilt, yet wanting resolution to confess it...His heart was bursting with the secret, and required the comfort of absolution, even at the price of severest penance...") and by Schedoni's own final confession and restoration of the truth, which liberates Vivaldi and Ellena.

² See Napier, p.134-135. Napier remarks that "deathbed confessions and repentances on the part of such villains are nearly always devices of plot (functioning to clarify relationships or bring new facts to life) not moments in which the reader reassesses character or excuses the criminal" (p.134).

would have been seeking the approval of a middle- and upper-class reading public whose tastes at this time were for Burke and Wilberforce.

In the next chapter I want to show how, after *The Monk* and *The Italian*, the cloister theme in Gothic fiction was used often and more overtly as a vehicle of counter-revolutionary anti-secular reaction. But I hope I have shown that I do not think Lewis and Radcliffe can be separated from this usage. There is sufficient evidence of equivocation in their representations of the Church which can be read as an intention on the part of the authors to stay within the bounds of sanctioned opinion and interpretation.

CHAPTER 4

The Gothic Nun and the Promotion of Devotion

Arm'd of herself she braves each hostile dart,
And only asks protection from the skies.
George Keate, *Ancient and Modern Rome. A Poem.*

The following chapters continue to challenge the orthodoxy of established opinion about the role of Catholicism in the Gothic novel by introducing Gothic novels which problematize the accepted reading of Gothic's attitude to Catholics in particular and religion in general. The authors discussed look back to the sentimental representations of the former age which as I have shown incorporated Catholicism as both *à la mode* motif and as possible spiritual territory. Their usage elevates the virtues of orthodoxy and piety in Christian belief through monastic or monkish characters. In these novels Catholic characters display heroic qualities in narratives depicting the superior advantages of pious Christian conduct or religious enthusiasm over 'worldly' sensibility. I situate these novels within the wider cultural context in which Catholicism was being viewed from a sentimental perspective as part of a conservative Christian moral discourse. This discourse encouraged a national reformation of manners as a means to rebuff and resist the spread of Jacobin principles in Britain.

Our examination begins with a discussion of the figure of the nun in several little- or unknown novels. The nun was popular with Gothic novelists, just as she had been with poets throughout the century. In the 1790s and early 1800s however they invested her with a moral significance more developed than that which she had had before. I have briefly discussed the literary tendency to sentimentalize the Eloisan nun-figure, detaching her from a religious framework, and using her rather to move the reader to a sublime melancholy. In the Gothic novel where the favourite time for devotions is sombre twilight or midnight,¹ and convents and monasteries are always situated in the most remote, dramatic landscapes, it is easy to see this tendency exemplified. Nuns are often conjured out of these gloomy Gothic settings, as if they are the spirits of the place like Warton's representation of Eloisa. One example I can give, from many, is a scene from an otherwise unremarkable anonymous Minerva Press

¹ See Regina Maria Roche, *Clermont. A Tale*, 1798 (London: The Folio Press, 1968), Radcliffe, *The Italian* and *Udolpho*, Richard Warner, *Netley Abbey, a Gothic story*, 1795 (New York: Arno Press, 1974).

novel called *The Nun and her Daughter*.¹ In this scene, the young Englishman William de Courcy discovers a ruined Roman villa during a ramble and spends an hour of melancholy contemplation and “mournful retrospection” considering the ephemerality of existence. Next, he stumbles upon a ruined Gothic chapel and inside, “kneeling on one of the steps to the altar, in an attitude of deep devotion, a female figure...She wore a white dress, and a long flowing veil, thrown carelessly back..half displaying to view the elevated look that bespoke every secret thought soaring beyond the narrow limits of terrestrial joys or sorrows” (Vol. II, p.2). The Gothic genre is abundant in such “elegant” apparitions, manifestations of the sombre twilight, the melancholy beauty of the scene and the mood of the young hero. Criticism has not attempted to make much more of the Gothic nun than this.² But the Gothic nun, particularly when she is a major character in the narrative, but even when she has only a supporting role, has dimensions which it is useful to explore.

Of the nuns in Radcliffe’s novels Hoeveler says, “..the sheer profusion of bleeding nuns who inhabit these convents...suggests there is no final haven, no escape from the realities of the physical female body. Women will always bleed; they will always be unclean in the eyes of the patriarchy and finally in their own eyes.” (Hoeveler, p.110). Critics predominantly look at the figure of the nun from an ahistorical feminist position, rather than seeking to understand what the nun represented to contemporary readers. To some extent, my argument in these chapters upholds the feminist critique: for me, the Gothic nun often evokes Pope’s Eloisa, who is essentially fighting “the realities of the physical female body” in her struggle for grace. However given the contemporary preoccupation with religion, the spiritual character of the Gothic nun and the implications of her spatial experience in the world are also important topics. Garrett, voicing similar sentiments to Hoeveler, declares that “the suffering nun”: “[is] the archetype for all the generations of oppression which women have passively accepted and will go on accepting.” (p.110). The Gothic nun is a victim of tyranny – the tyranny of the physical world which is centred around the commodification and ownership of women by men: a characteristic of the Gothic nun is that she is resigned to a permanently broken heart caused by the memory of a cruel lover or of a love affair thwarted by a despotic parent or relative. But Hoeveler also argues that “Power.....resides ultimately in the ability to tell one’s own narrative, and by doing so shape one’s own destiny...(this) is the core fantasy of the female Gothic novel” (p.101). It seems to me that if power resides in

¹ *The Nun and Her Daughter; or Memoirs of The Courville Family. A Novel.* (London, 1805).

² Mary Tarr, for example, in her study of how and where Catholic materials are employed in the Gothic novel has very little to say about the nuns that populate its pages. Generally she reads them as simply decorative.

telling your own story, if the voice is an instrument of power, then the Gothic nun has that power and it is the convent that provides a space for its sustenance. Cazire in *Confessions of The Nun of St. Omer*, Agnes in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Marietta in *The Abbess*,¹ Agnes in *The Monk*, Olivia in *The Italian* – nuns are always able to tell their stories, whereas “the Gothic heroine is forced to deny her own words because she is not allowed to speak” (Hoeveler, p.103). Hoeveler points out that in *The Italian* Olivia “is recognizable only through her voice. This is a deeply encrypted world, where the mother is reduced to a series of signs – her nun’s veil, her voice..” (p.105). It is worth remembering however that in the convent of Santa della Pieta Olivia speaks of her past and it is through this recounting that Ellena is able to unravel the secrets of her own life: that Olivia is her mother and Schedoni is not her father. It seems to me therefore that the convent has some considerable significance as a disimprisoning space, a haven even, if it allows a Gothic female to tell her own narrative, and liberate both herself and the Gothic heroine from the bonds of an inscrutable past - if it allows her to be ‘a voice’ as opposed to ‘a smile’.

The nun is able to give voice to her own story because she has escaped the patriarchal stranglehold which silenced her in the world governed by fathers, scheming uncles or brothers, duplicitous charmers. She has escaped the commodifying, objectifying world of the Gothic heroine where a wealthy virgin’s body is pursued and haggled over. She has, in effect, escaped her (contested) body; and therefore she is at liberty to tell her tale and sing. Gothic nuns always have beautiful singing voices, habitually described as angelic: disembodied. At the very least, the Gothic nun is a character who has found a space (unlike the Gothic heroine who is constantly confined) in which she can transcend the struggle, as Eloisa does. This space is not just physical – her cell, the convent chapel, the convent gardens - but also spiritual. It is a devotional space, a spiritual space, in which she can gather and reclaim herself. She can reclaim not only her voice, but her sense of self, of worth, of dignity. However I want to claim more for the Gothic nun – I want to demonstrate that in places, she is a heroine of uncommon proportions, meriting more attention than has hitherto been paid her.

Recent feminist criticism has suggested that the backlash against sensibility which grew in the last two decades of the century,² manifested itself strongly in the popular

¹ W.H. Ireland, *The Abbess, a romance* (Baltimore, 1801).

² In the 1790s in particular the weaker sex were encouraged not to indulge their weakness in heightened and excessive displays of emotion over very little, or in a morbid sentimentality. Before, the ideal of sensibility entailed extreme female weakness and fragility. “Female education” says David S. Miall, “was the enforcement of an anaemic, passive and compliant disposition, which was designed to prolong the childhood state of woman

literature of the period. Kate Ferguson Ellis, Janet Todd and Diane Hoeveler all assert that women writers in the 1780s and 1790s attempted to define appropriate behaviour for women, in conjunction with an emerging culture of reinvention of femininity along strongly conservative moral lines.¹ We have already noted how a rhetoric promoting the principles of reason and rationality over sensibility is commonplace in the Gothic novel: Radcliffe's heroines, for example, are always being warned of the dangers of indulging their feelings too much. Hoeveler insists however that many of the Gothic novels of this period were actively "propagandizing a new form of conduct for women". This new form of conduct is actually a strategy of resistance, she argues: "The position that Radcliffe and her followers advocated throughout the female Gothic was one of wise-passiveness or what we might accurately recognize as a form of passive aggression" (p.7). Hoeveler's argument is a compelling one as far as the Radcliffian heroine goes. But this thesis questions her assertion that "the position...advocated throughout the female Gothic" is specifically the one defined above. I want to argue that the Gothic nun is in places a compelling heroine who is significant as a symbol of feminine strength: specifically a conservative symbol of obligation to one's orthodox Christian beliefs and values, and traditional notions of devotion and piety.

In a series of essays by a 'Lady' published in 1764 called *The Progress of the Female Mind*, a discourse is evolved in which female self-possession is positioned within the sphere of the spirit. This work is cited by Harriet Guest in her book *Small Change: – Women, Learning, Patriotism 1750-1810*.² In the first of the essays, Guest points out, the authoress argues "that because women inhabit a world they can neither control nor understand, they are obliged to turn inward, and to find in religion an idea of direction and progress within which the individual can at least exercise self-control" (p.137). Guest speculates that religion "might seem to figure as nothing more significant than the consolation of the dispossessed, the means of demarcating an internal space in which women could exercise some self-determination" (p.138). But the lady's claim becomes more assertive as she argues that

(David. S. Miall, "The Preceptor as Fiend: Radcliffe's Psychology of Gothic", *Jane Austen and Mary Shelley and Their Sisters*, ed. Laura Dabundo (Lanham: University Press of America, 2000), p.4). But with the open threat of Jacobinism came the understanding that the weak female at the heart of the middle-class English home needed to show control: see Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution: 1790-1827* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984); Elizabeth Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood, an Historical View of the Maternal Instinct* (London: Souvenir Press, 1981), p.205.

¹ See Ferguson Ellis; also Todd. In 1796, for example, Thomas Gisborne wrote *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*. Gisborne's treatise makes it plain that women were expected to shape the lives and dispositions of everyone around them by acting as the perfect model of strength in body, mind and virtue: a model that was promoted by Hannah More and others.

² Harriet Guest, *Small Change – Women, Learning, Patriotism 1750-1810* (University of Chicago Press: 2000), II, p.6.

religion extends “an impress of dignity and importance far exceeding that of monarchs...and has as much to do with the universal rule or law of truth as the most soaring genius in the scale of intelligence”.¹ Whereas intellectual pursuit might be denied women, they *can* think profoundly about religion; and then the claim becomes (according to Guest) that women “will be unable to think superficially about anything, because nothing is irrelevant to religion” (p.139). What this enquiry offers is a vision of intellectual development centred on the application of profound religious thought. Such a vision is setting out to persuade the reader of both the usefulness and value of the Church and of Christianity, and of the possibility of legitimate intellectual development for women: through religion, or rather through paying attention to theology, women will no longer *be able* to think superficially. The Lady is offering the idea of a standard of intellectual accomplishment and self-development which both resists, and suggests the subversion of, the paradigm of sensibility.

Such pious enquiries became relevant in the last two decades of the century when an increasing hostility to Christian revelation became associated with a hostility to the British constitution. Moral theorists such as Gisborne encouraged men to renew their sense of Christian devotion in social, political and ecclesiastical spheres, and women to act as models of Christian virtue in the home. In an attempt to make Christian devotion attractive to men, Gisborne, Burke and others refer to it in patriotic and heroic terms. For women, works such as Hannah More’s hugely popular *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) promoted Christian devotion as fulfilling and liberating.

During the years 1790 to 1820 the rhetoric of loyalty to the Church transmuted into a rhetoric of religious enthusiasm through the influence of Evangelicalism and the European religious revival. At this time many writers sought to disseminate popular religious opinions through their work, and given that its target audience was young women it is unsurprising that the Gothic novel became a vehicle for this ‘promotion’ of Christian devotion. *The Orphan of the Rhine* by Eleanor Sleath (1798), *The Monk of the Grotto* (anon) (1800), *The English Nun* by Catharine Selden (1797), and *The Abbess of Valtiera* by Agnes Lancaster (1816) all posit spirituality as a means of female fulfillment. The heroine in these novels is someone who steps outside the sphere of the conventional heroine into a ‘divine’ sphere of self-possession. Hers is a godly sphere, not merely a stoical one like that of the Gothic and sentimental heroines who make a virtue of suffering in order to escape conflict: embracing poverty and ill-health rather than living under the protection of an immoral guardian, for

¹ *The Progress of the Female Mind, in some interesting enquiries. By a Lady* (London, 1764), p.71.

example. In these novels the figure of the nun and all she represents is potentially radical in the manner of the ultimately subversive claim of *The Female Mind*. These narratives imply that religious enthusiasm is the only effective buffer against moral erosion and that an intensity of spiritual development is at the heart of moral (and thus cultural) progression. But they also show the cultivation of Christian piety leading to autonomy for a woman, then to wisdom, and finally to influence in the wider world.

The Gothic readership, I have argued, was educated, leisured, predominantly conservative. For these readers an allegiance to Church and King was increasingly seen as a virtue from 1789 onwards. They would have been more tolerant of Catholicism than we might assume from previous scholarship, for in the 1790s they would have seen the resistance of the French émigré priests as upholding the order and stability for which the patriotic Englishman was fighting. The existence of narratives in which the Gothic nun is developed to become a heroine of Christian virtue and piety therefore seems appropriate, the Gothic nun being a more fitting role model, as moralists at the time might argue, for the female reader than either the masculinized or the hyperfeminine heroine of sensibility. And yet these novels have been ignored or overlooked: perhaps because they do not fit the prevailing popular reading of the Gothic as subtle and seditious.

“The Beauty of Holiness”: *The Orphan of the Rhine* by Eleanor Sleath.

Radcliffe’s nuns are often, famously, ‘protestantized’ – in other words good nuns in Radcliffe’s novels tend to pay lip service to the rites and rituals of Catholicism only, and rather than proselytizing their faith, manifest an impartial, universal ‘benevolence’. If we look at others writers of the commonly-termed ‘Radcliffe school’ however, we can find a representation of conventualism that is more sympathetic to Catholicism. Catharine Selden (in *The Count de Santerre*, 1797) and Eleanor Sleath for example, treat the taking of monastic vows and similar Catholic rites as the ultimate sublime experience. Not perhaps the sublime of Burke’s philosophy of which the common stock is terror, and which produces a suspension of the motions of the soul that temporarily checks all cogency. Sleath and Selden’s sense of the sublime has more in common with that of Catholic counter-enlightenment thinker James Usher whose hugely popular treatise *Clio: or, a Discourse on Taste* (1767) links the sublime

decisively to ‘religious passion’, and defines the sublime more by ‘rapture’ and ‘ecstasy’ than suspended emotion.¹

The Orphan of the Rhine written by Eleanor Sleath and published in 1798, has been made famous by Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1818) in which it is one of seven “horrid” novels recommended to Catherine Morland by Isabella Thorpe.² *The Orphan of the Rhine* was a title popular enough for Austen to quote alongside Radcliffe’s *The Italian* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, a full twenty years after its first publication. Clearly Sleath’s work had a high profile at the time and the Minerva Press published a further five of Sleath’s novels.³ Both Michael Sadleir and Mary Tarr surmised from her writings that Sleath was a Roman Catholic and Devendra Varma admits that “internal evidence” would suggest she had “strong leanings towards Roman Catholicism.”⁴ However Sleath’s family had strong connections with the Protestant Church and she is buried in an Anglican churchyard in Gilmorton, Leicestershire. My evidence suggests that it is likely that Sleath could have written this novel without being a Catholic. The climate of sympathy and the various cultural and aesthetic leanings towards Catholicism that I have argued were clearly in evidence by and in the 1790s, make possible the type of sympathetic representation of monasticism we find here. The narrative focuses on nuns, convents and a culture of ‘cloistering’ and has a tendency to highlight the ‘beauty’ and ‘sublimity’ of holiness in references to Catholicism.

Julie de Rubigne, the first of the novel’s heroines, is a surprise on two counts: she is a single mother and she is a zealous Roman Catholic. Julie is alone in the world. Her father was killed by melancholy, in what we may see as a perfect example of the demonisation of unregulated emotion in the 1790s: he was actually possessed by melancholy, often running from the room “as if agitated by the appearance of some frightful demon” (p.32). Julie’s mother, a woman with “true dignity of soul”, soon followed him to the grave and Julie was reluctantly taken from a convent, where had she enjoyed happy hours “observing the rules of the order” into the care of a shallow, worldly aunt. The aunt wanted to match Julie with a rich suitor. But Julie rebuffed vigorously the romantic advances of a perfect candidate who happened to be a convert to Protestantism. This is because she had made a vow to her mother never to marry outside of her religion, revering “with her mother the doctrines of the Church of Rome”. Even though this decision on the part of Julie leads to her initial troubles, the

¹ James Usher, *Clio: or, a Discourse on Taste. Addressed to a Young Lady*, 1767, ed. J. Mathew (London, 1809), pp. 126, 104. *Clio* was reprinted in 1769, 1777, 1803 and 1809 and in Dublin in 1770 and 1778.

² Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 1818 (London: Penguin, 1994), p.27.

³ *Who's the murderer?* (1802), *The Bristol Heiress; or the Errors of Education* (1809), *The Nocturnal Minstrel; or the Spirit of the Woods* (1810), *Pyrenean Banditti* (1811).

⁴ Devendra Varma, introduction, *The Orphan of the Rhine* by Eleanor Sleath, (London: Folio Press, 1968), p.9.

novel presents this adherence to her beliefs as a noble and honourable trait. Throughout, Sleath treats Julie as pure, strong and noble. She is also strongly drawn to the contemplative life and the cloister.

At the beginning of the story, Julie has taken herself out of the world in a way that is not conventional for a Gothic heroine: she is entirely self-sufficient. She is living in retirement with her son and a domestic, having been tricked into marriage and abandoned by the Marchese de Montferrat who promised to liberate her from the machinations of her aunt. She takes refuge in a penitential space, much like a cloister. By cloistering herself physically, she 'recovers' herself at a spiritual level:

In these calm and peaceful shades she had taken refuge from the censure of a rash unfeeling world; and had in some degree gained a tranquillity and composure of mind, which she once believed it impossible ever to recover. She had endeavoured to reconcile herself to her misfortunes, and to check, as much as in her power, the natural sensibility of her disposition, which she was convinced was too acute to admit of lasting comfort.

She knew that true happiness was only to be found in the bosom of religion and virtue, and the warmth of her affection led her to indulge in that glow of religious enthusiasm, which elevates the soul beyond every earthly pursuit, and renders it susceptible of the most worthy impressions (p.11).

"Lasting comfort" located not in "natural sensibility" but in "the bosom of religion", spiritual insight growing from "the glow of religious enthusiasm": Julie's experience resembles Eloisa's spiritual journey from Abelard to God. Here, the devotion associated with religious enthusiasm subordinates the workings of 'natural sensibility' and produces a refinement of spirit capable of generating "true happiness". Madeline, the mother of Clermont in the eponymous novel also finds out that true happiness lies in this spiritual place: "What!" she cries in horror to the man she loved for whom she forsook the convent, "Did you snatch me from the altar of my God, from the dwelling of piety and peace, but to plunge me into guilt and misery?"¹

Importantly, the spiritual process enables Julie to find joy in "the silent walks of domestic life" (p.64): in other words, her spiritual existence makes what would otherwise be a domestic nightmare (eighteenth century single motherhood) into a little paradise of "undisturbed felicity" (p.60). It is interesting to note that Julie becomes a character who is presented as almost transcending the physical. This transcendence permeates the novels treated here distinguishing the heroic Gothic nun and monk from the conventional heroes and

¹ Regina Maria Roche, *Clermont. A Tale*. 1798 (The Folio Press, London 1968) p.226.

heroines of the Gothic whose physical bodies are always immured, restricted, bartered, abducted or violated in some way. The conventual hero/ine on the other hand escapes physical violation by removing him/herself to the cloister, or by moving in a spiritual cloistered space - their piety acting as an invisible shield against violation by Gothic forces of evil. Having established that Julie is pious, Sleath no longer presents her as physically (i.e. sexually) available, despite her youth. In the first scene she is given another child (Laurette) by the Marchese, but not through sex and childbirth: rather she receives a letter from the Marchese in which he demands that she take care of the girl at Elfinbach castle, for which he will pay her. Again, Julie achieves a cloistered domestic situation, one that does not involve the need – ever - to be physically close to a man. During an exploration of Elfinbach, Julie finds a secret passage where she discovers the Marchese is keeping La Roque, a friend of hers, prisoner. She helps him to escape at great risk to herself (this is another example of her self-sufficiency, for there are few Gothic heroines active enough to liberate someone else from confinement) and he is given shelter in the neighbouring convent by her good friend and confidante, Father Benedicta. However when the Marchese's serving-man discovers Julie's bracelet in the secret passage, implicating her in La Roque's escape, she disappears from the narrative altogether. At the end of the novel her son Enrico finds her in a monastery about to take the novitiate veil (believing Enrico to be dead and Laurette to be engaged to the Marchese de Montferrat). Significantly Laurette recognizes Julie by her voice, rather than her momentarily unveiled face (p.314). After the death of the Marchese, Julie becomes a legitimate husbandless 'wife', as she takes on the name and role of the Marchesa de Montferrat. She remains, in other words, the chaste, self-possessed woman, untouched by male hands that she has been throughout the novel.

Sleath's pious females are survivors, unassailable, unencumbered by gross physicality, unrestricted by patriarchy. At the very best they are saints. Chapter 9 of *The Orphan of the Rhine* begins appropriately with a stanza from *Eloisa to Abelard* – appropriate because in this chapter we meet the Abbess. Julie, aptly, spends much time socializing at the local convent,¹ and there she becomes friends with the Abbess of the house. The Abbess is an

¹ Indeed, Julie is practically a lay-sister: a fervent Catholic ("whose zeal in the cause of her persuasion was not less animated (than her mother's)" (p.34-35), with an insistent calling to the monastic life: "Had she not been withheld by earthly connections, how willingly would (she) have committed herself to this holy retirement. The placid countenances of the sisters, the gentleness, the humility of their deportments, the air of solemnity that dignified their movements, were so grateful to her feelings, that she was tempted to believe...that peace was only to be enjoyed in the solitude of a cloister." (p.131). At Cecilia's funeral, she actually wears a habit, or at least "a long black robe, with a veil of the same colour, but little different either in form or texture to those worn by the order" (p.133). And for a brief period she takes the novitiate veil.

exemplary religious and her representation demonstrates the way in which the Gothic nun is able to tell her own narrative; something the young heroine is never allowed to do from the rigorous confines of her position within the patriarchal system. The Abbess - graceful, refined, controlled – like all Gothic nuns, effected her own escape from a world in which seething male passions were running riot. In her youth, before she became a nun, the Abbess – Adela (note the derivation from Adélaïde) – was desired by two friends and one, the son of Adela's morose guardian Monsieur de Santong, killed the other. Like Eloisa she still wears "a precious relic" of her dead lover, the perusal of which 'momentarily' disturbs the serenity of her features. Adela's sensibility is not dead, but having the voice to talk about her past suffering enables her to contain it. Her 'passion' is now a memento merely – something she wears on her breast rather than within it. Indeed her status as a 'suffering nun' is secondary to her status as the accomplished and charismatic leader of a thriving community of nuns. This abbess is successful in her position and happy with her lot. Such characters seem to challenge the critical depiction of Gothic conventualism as "the only viable Christian alternative to suicide" (Garrett, p.77). The success of these women as nuns, and the 'veneration' they so often receive from their communities, recalls the real-life Héloïse who transformed herself into an exceptional Abbess, both distinguished and revered.

Whilst telling her tale to Julie, a nun approaches the Abbess who is the extreme type of her companions:

As she advanced towards the Superior with a pensive and dignified air, she bent gracefully to Madame Chamont,¹ and drawing aside her veil, discovered to her one of the most lovely faces she had ever seen. It was pale, and marked with sorrow; but there was a certain expression of softness and resignation in her fine Grecian features, an air of meek, corrected sadness, that could not be perused without pity and affection. As soon as she had delivered her work, and had received the grateful commendation of the Abbess, she drew her veil again over her face, and retired. As soon as she was gone, Madame Chamont, willing to withdraw her revered friend from the luxury of too tender remembrances, praised the singular beauty of the sister, and requested to be informed of her name. 'It is sister Cecilia,' returned the Superior, 'one of the most devout Nuns of the order. She never enters into any of our amusements, except at the holy festivals, and seems to dedicate the whole of her life to prayer and religious exercises. She confines herself almost entirely to her cell, seldom enters into conversation with any other than her confessor, and preserves a life of uniform reserve and austerity. ...yet though she has preserved this invariable reserve, none of the inhabitants of the cloister are more tenderly, more universally beloved. She is the first to shew consolation and kindness to all who are in need of it; her breast is the temple of

¹ Julie changes her name to Madame Chamont when she moves to Elfinbach.

benevolence, the seat of truth and of virtue. Her charity is as unbounded as her other excellencies, and she seems capable of no other enjoyment than what she derives from the source of religion, and the happiness of her fellow-creatures.” (p.75)

“Corrected sadness” implying a sadness not over-indulged is a term that belongs to the backlash against sensibility which Radcliffe so often evokes. But one of the contradictions inherent in Radcliffe’s work is that, whilst her heroines are constantly warned about the dangers of indulging their feelings too much, their worth is measured by their ability to be moved to overwhelming melancholy by the sight of a purple-headed mountain at dusk, or extremes of terror by the call of the owl at midnight. In other words, a trembling sensibility which ultimately controls the intellect and defines the personality is, in the final analysis, valuable in Radcliffe’s Gothic world. Sleath on the other hand foregrounds female characters who ‘correct’ their ‘sadness’, who control their terror. Her nuns (including Julie) reroute or channel extreme emotional states into pious works, and in piety they find self-fulfilment and reward. Cecilia is venerated by the community because in transcending the shame and suffering of her worldly life, she has derived from ‘the source of religion’ a sage-like spiritual excellence. Later we learn that Cecilia has died, which gives Sleath the opportunity to render sublime this ‘beautiful penitent’. The priest (“impressed with the spirit and fire of devotion”) gives a sermon on “the beauty of holiness, and the misery inseparable from vice and immorality” and the nuns sing strains “almost divine” which “to the ear of enthusiasm sounded like the chaunt of angels” – clearly, the author invites her audience to imagine that ‘enthusiast’s ear’ (p.135). Cecilia’s coffin is deposited beneath “the image of the Magdalen in the act of penitence”, layering icon upon icon. The scene draws on conventional references such as the Guido Magdalen. But Sleath’s allusions have a coherence that is distinctive. Like Beckford, Sleath seems psychologically appreciative of Catholicism and her use of Catholic materials evokes a religious state at the same time as they evoke a Gothic atmosphere. Sleath is drawing on the sentimental usage of Catholicism to which conservative Christians were responding at this time in their drive to uphold Church and constitution.

I am arguing that Sleath elevates the Catholic elements and Catholic characters in her work: indeed, piety seems to be how Sleath measures the value of her female characters. Cecilia, taking religious devotion further than both the Abbess (with her congenial chats) and Julie, is rendered sublime. Yet those without piety are ambivalently defined. One such character is the Signora d’Orfo. She is a sophisticated and fashionable lady with “polished ..manners” and a Wollstonecraftian “frank” conversational style. She is also the creature of

the Marchese, in his employ and in his thrall. We sense that she is the Gothic anti-type to the Radcliffian heroine described by Hoeveler as “moving through space in a sort of manic dance/hysterically acting out her assault on patriarchy.” The Signora appears to be an enlightened character of neo-classical elegance and taste, but she is also essentially two-faced: a friend to both Laurette and the Marchese. She is typically not referred to by name, but as ‘the Signora’: a distancing tactic. Furthermore, she is an advocate of “unrestrained intercourse with the world” which makes her ‘weak’ to “the fashionable elegances of life”; and although her love of liberty is recognized as “natural”, yet we sense Sleath’s faint distaste at her lack of filial obedience. Although these qualities of taste, beauty, elegance, enlightenment, naturalness should make the Signora attractive, Sleath never quite allows the reader to trust or like her. Whereas the nuns in the novel although so much less accomplished are described with the enthusiasm reserved for perfect examples of womanhood.

Sleath’s conventual focus permeates her portrayal of landscape. For Radcliffe, the contemplation of the wonders of Nature generates the sublime, but not in the Burkean sense. As Geary says, “the sublime raises not so much Burkean sensations as Addisonian appreciation of the grandeur of the Creator’s handiwork” in order to demonstrate “the superiority of such natural piety to conventional religious dogmatism (or at least to Catholicism)” (p.44). He goes on to describe Radcliffe’s as “the blandest of religious feeling”(p.45). Sleath’s descriptions of landscape however tend to focus on a church or abbey with the wind carrying not the terrifying sound of a distant cataract or mountain storm, but the abbey bells or the song of nuns calling the faithful to worship. For Sleath sublimity lies in the revelation of the beauty of holiness, therefore her natural landscapes are drawn to frame or slowly reveal evidence of Christian worship, and complement its beauties. Landscape constantly evokes Christian devotion:

Sometimes they would ascend the steep crags of the mountains, where all was wild, waste, and rude, yet in its naked simplicity grand, stupendous, and sublime. Here they would contemplate the awful beauty of the scene, the retiring hills half lost in the distant horizon, and the spires of some neighbouring abbeys just appearing amid the deep gloom of the woods, and hearken to the faint sound of the vesper bell, borne at intervals upon the wing of the breeze; and sometimes, when not a breath of air disturbed the universal calm, or shook the light foliage of the leaves, the distant chaunt of the Nuns would be heard, now swelling into holy rapture, and now sinking into sweet and mournful cadence, till softened by distance, or lost in the rising flutter of the gale, it died away upon the ear. (p.61)

The devotional landscape of spires seems to rescue the reader’s imaginative eye from being

obscured by the awful ‘cragginess’ and ‘rudeness’ of the wild mountain: the same mountain that inspires Radcliffe’s musings on Natural religion. In Sleath’s description, by contrast, Christian devotion calls “upon the wing of the breeze” and distracts the eye from the wild intemperate vision. Clearly there is didactic intent in this device which poses emblems of Christianity in the way of vistas that inspire sensibility.

The Orphan of the Rhine contains many enthusiastic descriptions of Catholic rite and ritual. Sleath is lavish in these moments, her acute sense of the beauty of holiness prompting Varma to comment that “The smell of incense wafts from her pages” (Introduction, *Orphan of the Rhine*, p.9). But there is more to her knowledge of Catholic ritual than a “[fondness] for vestments and ceremony”. In her long description of a nun taking the veil, Sleath seems to want to inform the reader of the meaning of many of the ‘mysteries’ of this ritual - which she does with gravity:

..a number of rose-lipped girls, fair and beautiful as angels, who were resident for a convent education, strewed flowers over them as they passed along to the last ceremony, that of the coronation, emblematic of that crown of glory, which is promised as a reward to those who, after suffering continual trials and mortifications, are admitted into the regions of felicity (p.307).

The “rose-lipped girls” are an extravagant and fanciful touch, but the description of the ceremony is precise, down to an inventory of the chapel’s embellishments¹ and the meaning behind certain symbols. Sleath is creating a realistic scene in order to educate and initiate the reader into a religious mystery. Sleath employs the figure of the nun – the fair, pale and delicate votaress-sacrifice in this strange rite – to inspire the congregation in the narrative and her focus on the congregation is clearly in order to make her readers feel as the congregation does. The nun evokes feelings similar to those evoked by an awesome mountain in a Radcliffe novel: as they watch her receive the cross of Mount Calvary to choral accompaniment, the crowd are transported, “wrapped in undivided attention, [they] appeared to have forgotten that they were among the inhabitants of that world, above which they felt so strangely elevated” (p.307). This nun has an English blue-eyed beauty but, in complete contrast to the representations of Robert Merry and George Keate (see p.64 footnote 2), Sleath considers the girl’s beauty enhanced not diminished by the ascetic dress: “the extreme

¹ “The organ was loftily situated in a gallery built for the purpose: it was composed chiefly of ebony, and ornamented with curtains of crimson velvet, which were curiously wrought with flowers of gold and purple. The altar was decorated with a profusion of wax-tapers, interspersed with vases, containing frankincense, and other costly perfumes. The table was covered with an embroidered cloth, which was worked by the ingenious hands of the vestals in the most chaste and sacred devices” (p. 304).

delicacy of her form was rendered infinitely more attractive from being finely contrasted with the long sable robe” (p.306). Merry and Keate seek the sublime in the horror of asceticism, in what they see as its terrifying tendency to emaciate and wither the natural abundant beauties of the feminine frame and render it unfit to be possessed and adored by men. Likewise the Signora criticizes the nunnery for taking away from beautiful young girls their “powers of attraction” (p.178). The nun, because she cannot be enjoyed sexually, because she can no longer be possessed by men, might as well be dead, and is often portrayed as cadaverous.¹ But Sleath represents the nun as an object of sublimity for those very reasons. The delicate frame of the girl is enwrapped – swamped - in attire that denies the attractions of the female body, that places it beyond the reach of the male gaze and consequently beyond male possession and objectification (unlike the restrictive clothes of the period, the habit is roomy, unfastened). This, the ultimate sacrifice – substituting heaven for the possibility of, and desire for, earthly love - exalts the girl. Her “meekness almost angelic” – an indication of her spiritual progress, she is already beatific, celestially disembodied – signifies preternatural strength. In her capacity for self-denial, humility and renunciation she transcends ordinary masculinity and femininity alike. It is this strength, this unassailability, divine in origin, that creates for the fictional observers and for Sleath’s readers the sense of wonder prerequisite for the production of the sublime.

And it is this sense of the sublime that Sleath aims to communicate to her audience in order to persuade them that piety is beautiful, heroic and the only necessary or worthwhile female adornment or accomplishment. Sleath’s message for her female readers clearly feeds into the moral discourse of Gisborne, More and the other moral reformers who were attempting to stamp out sensibility and reshape femininity as a means of imbuing men, and therefore society, with conservative Christian values.

The Grate Escape: *The Monk of the Grotto*

A “very unusual” novel of “exceptional merit” according to Montague Summers, is the anonymous *Lusignan, or The Abbaye of La Trappe*, published by Minerva Press in 1801. What impresses Summers about this “truly interesting work” is the fact that “although..the distresses which involve the young Marquis de Lusignan and his loved Emily are due to the malignancy and perfidy of an ecclesiastic, the villainous Abbé La Haye, the episodes – and

¹ “Male scapegoating of sexually unattached women” is a theme discussed by Nancy Lusignan Schultz in her introduction to *Veil of Fear : nineteenth-century convent tales by Rebecca Reed and Maria Monk* (West Lafayette: NotaBell Books, 1999), p.27.

there are many – which have their scene in cloister and in abbey are treated without offence [and] there are many significant details which one would hardly have expected any but a Catholic to have known and appreciated” (p.194). Summers is puzzled by this because, given the incidence of common Gothic errors about Catholicism in the text, “the author can hardly have been a Catholic”. The representation of the monastery of St. Bernard Summers finds especially gratifying:

The austerities of the rule, the life of the monks, the vigils, the fasts, the prayers, are described with a correctness and, I add, a restraint which it is truly refreshing to remark...the picture is drawn without melodrama or meretricious thrills, and gives evidence of study and research. Moreover, an unfeigned piety informs the closing pages of this striking romance...the conclusion..is extremely poignant and pathetic, and the climax is treated with the utmost delicacy and reserve (p.195).

Summers may not have been quite so surprised if he had also read the novels discussed here. The attitude of the author of *Lusignan* is not unique in treating monasticism with “unfeigned piety” and demonstrating, without offence or controversy, a knowledge of its rituals and rule. I have argued that such treatments appeared throughout the eighteenth century. But of course, Catholic culture in these novels also has a symbolic quality, indicating wherever it can the intensity of the author’s feelings about the transcendental power, the sublimity, of Christian piety, and underpinning a discourse which exalts orthodox Christian beliefs and a pious Christian way of life. For this, the author need not subscribe to Catholicism but merely to the conservatism of the post-sentimental and revolutionary era.

The plot of *Lusignan* closely follows the plot of *Comminge*. In his dying moments, a pious brother of the house of La Trappe, Brother Ambrose, reveals himself to be a woman (Emily), the lover of Lusignan Duke de Meronville who is about to take his vows. As Emily dies in Meronville’s arms she cries: “Behold in me the sad victim of sensibility-..a woman who has lived for man – but dies for God!- a guilty miserable woman, who calls on religion to assist her end!”¹ Importantly, as with all the nuns in this argument, Emily defines herself as “a sad victim” not of the Church or of God, but of the demon sensibility. “Tremble all you who listen” she urges, “these are the effects of the passions, the fatal illusions of sensibility!” (p.238). But in her final moments, lying on a sacramental bed of ashes (a truly dramatic touch!) she takes a spiritual journey that follows Eloisa’s path from Abelard to God (“a woman who has lived for man – but dies for God!”):

¹ *Lusignan, or The Abbaye of La Trappe* (London, 1801), p.227.

“His arm, by ways unknown, has led me from the confines of hell to the sweet anchorage of heavenly hope! Let my lips, O God, by a supernatural effort, afford a shining proof of thy glory, reanimating my expiring voice, suspend my fleeting breath, that I may declare thy wonderous works!” (p.226).

Throughout the retelling of her story, Emily addresses not Meronville but God and the “virtuous recluses”, the monks of the “holy fraternity” around her as if she is in the confessional. Finally, she entreats Meronville to learn to die by the example of her humble and contrite death: just as Pope’s Eloisa entreats her Abelard (“Teach me at once, and learn of me to die” [line 328]¹), and Adélaïde entreats Comminge. The treatment of Catholic mortification is, as Summers notes, ‘delicate’ and ‘reserved’. As a final nod to Abélard and Héloïse, Emily requests that when Meronville dies, he be buried in the tomb with her.

Perhaps Summers would have been surprised to learn that a year before *Lusignan*, a novel very similar in plot and temperament which also borrows directly from the French cloister theme, was published. In *A Bicentenary Bibliography of The Monk*,² Frederick S. Frank remarks briefly of *The Monk of the Grotto; or Eugenio and Virginia* (1800), a novel by Charles Antoine Pigault-Lebrun which was then translated into English, that it “borrows horror elements taken from the plot of *The Monk* to enliven the sentimentality of the original”. The Oxford University Press bibliographical survey of prose fiction published in the British Isles, *The English Novel 1770-1829*, gives conflicting information about the novel’s authorship. It notes that the French original has not been discovered. Whether or not Lebrun was the author, *The Monk of the Grotto* was a successful novel. It was still in the circulating libraries at the end of the 1810s.³ There was also an American edition published in Boston as late as 1846.⁴ Clearly, the novel had an enduring popularity.

The novel’s mixture of influences is interesting. The story follows that of Addison’s *Spectator* piece *Theodosius and Constantia*, the one versified by Jeffrey under the title *Father Francis and Sister Constance*. But Virginia, the heroine, is a tragic heroine, more like Adélaïde (I mentioned earlier that after de Tencin, the cloister theme took on a tragic element). Interestingly, however Virginia’s tragic death is not achieved in quite the same

¹ This line can be compared to the lines in Crashaw’s *Hymn to the Name and Honor of the Admirable Saint Theresa*, “For him she’ll teach them how to die” and “Must learn in life to die like thee”.

² *Romanticism on the Net*, 8, November 1997, <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat0385/monkbiblio.html>

³ According to the Circulating Library Checklist compiled by Jacqueline Belanger, Peter Garside and Anthony Mandal as part of their database work on the Corvey Collection at Cardiff, the novel appears in two circulating library catalogues, the Newman and the Kinnear of 1808.

⁴ Cited in *The English Novel 1770-1829*, eds. Peter Garside, James Raven, Rainer Schöwerling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Vol. II: 1800-1829, p.122.

way. Virginia is imprisoned by an evil abbess and it is her incarceration that leads to her death. As I have shown, the more violent conventions of the cloister theme such as the live burial of nuns were introduced by the revolutionary *Théâtre monacal* (in plays such as *Camille, or The Vault* by Marsollier) and were widely copied in literature (Lewis of course, famously restaged the trope in *The Monk*). In 1800, when *The Monk of the Grotto* was published, these literary conventions were still current. But as Summers notes, ‘anti-monastic conventions’ are not necessarily in conflict with the representation of the monastic life, and monastic goodness, in this piece. Or at least it is difficult to read the cruelty of the abbess as a comment on the viciousness of conventualism when the character of Virginia so exalts conventual qualities and posits them as a mechanism of self-possession. We must keep sight of the monastic narrative’s other qualities, which have been so overlooked by critics who overemphasize and oversimplify its use of certain anti-Catholic tropes.

Eugenio and Virginia are passionate friends from birth and are destined to marry. However, Virginia’s spineless father and Eugenio’s greedy and lascivious mother begin an affair which leads to the destruction of the other two (benign) parents. Left at the mercy of the deviant pair, who secretly marry, Eugenio and Virginia’s marriage is thwarted by Virginia’s new stepmother who wants her son, for financial reasons, to marry a different rich heiress. Eugenio is sent by his mother and stepfather to Rome to make his fortune. Virginia meanwhile, like the typical Gothic heroine, is being systematically expelled from the family. She finds herself usurped in her father’s affection, first by his new wife and then by a newborn male heir. Finally she is ousted from any claim on the family by her stepmother’s trickery: she is deceived into believing that Eugenio has met someone else. Devastated, Virginia begs to be allowed to enter a convent, thus fulfilling all her stepmother’s hopes.

Although Virginia’s ‘vocation’ is charged by her desire to escape a world and a man that have disappointed her, her decision gives her immediate equanimity. It may be the poise of the martyr, but Virginia has not had self-control of any kind until this point. From the beginning of the novel Virginia is merely Eugenio’s “other half” (they are ‘twins’ as Adélaïde and Comminge are in *their* youth), as well as being a pawn in the Gothic familial property game. She is entirely defined by other characters and has no identity outside the structure of the family. Now, although her father (who suddenly regrets his treatment of her) and the servants in the household are stricken with grief by her decision to become a nun, Virginia is “calm and tranquil; her countenance was unusually animated; a degree of self-

exultation seemed painted in her eyes, and expressed in her actions.”¹ The further she travels from home, the greater her enthusiasm becomes. On seeing the convent “her eyes shone with supernatural brilliancy” (p.113). As she is shown around the convent and its grounds, “every object...made a deep impression upon her soul” (p.116). Finally she marks “a grove of cypress, where she determined often to meditate upon the new and sacred duties she meant to impose upon herself” (p.116). In her halcyon days with Eugenio, the young lovers had built a “rustic altar” to their future union within a similar grove (p.26). Virginia rebuilds the symbolic grove in her imagination, dedicated not to love but to religious devotion. Immediately following this imaginative substitution of piety for love, she urges the Marchioness “with a degree of enthusiastic animation” to “obtain for her that favour which could constitute the only consolation her soul was now susceptible of.... “I feel incapable of enjoying that calm tranquility my soul pants for, until I shall have entirely devoted myself to the sacred duties of that state I wish to embrace. I would enter upon them, if possible, without delay” (p.116-7). A week later, Virginia takes the novitiate veil. It is interesting how Virginia becomes defined as an individual at this point. In contrast to the position she occupied within the family - wandering like a phantom around the grounds of her father’s home, dislocated, without purpose or place (p. 96) - her character is now developed to the extent that she is demanding duties, and a role, for herself. And in this novel the cloister is the location within which this transformation takes place, and piety its motivating force. By contrast, love, passion and familial loyalty are presented as destructive of a sense of ‘self’.

In the cloister Virginia develops willpower and a sense of purpose and like Héloïse and Sleath’s Adela and Cecilia, carves out a valuable position for herself in the conventual community: “her zeal, the fervour with which she fulfilled her duties, soon acquired the esteem, and even the veneration of her sisters” (p.118). However the world does not leave her alone: a false announcement of the marriage of Eugenio in a newspaper throws her once more into despair. Again, with despair, comes a desire to transcend earthly ties by cleaving to the divine. Having learned that her favourite companion, the abbess, is transferring to another convent, Virginia begs that she confer on her the black veil before she goes. The abbess tries to talk Virginia out of what might prove to be a rash decision, but “her countenance had assumed that calm serenity which for some time had formed its habitual expression”. She is resolute. The day is set for the very day of Eugenio’s wedding and Virginia feels a “melancholy satisfaction” at the neat symmetry of their “indissoluble vows” being made

¹ *The Monk of the Grotto; or Eugenio and Virginia*, 1800 (Cork, 1802), p.110.

simultaneously – his to earthly bonds, hers to divine. Her vow-taking, described in terms of terror and passion, evokes the sublime:

Virginia pronounced the fatal ceremonials with a strong and elevated voice; her eyes sparkled with a celestial fire, but soon after an excessive paleness overspread her lovely figure; and when the black veil, the mournful emblem of her renunciation of the world, was placed over her, she seemed ready to expire with terror (p.123).

Undoubtedly the novel's portrayal of monastic vows is ambiguous: Virginia is always faltering between the two worlds, hers is the mortal struggle of Eloisa. But the significance of this struggle is that a lover's vows are likewise painful - in this novel, they bring nothing but sorrow. Tranquillity however, the narrative implies, is more likely to be found in the bosom of religion than in the arms of a passionate lover: the abbess comes to Virginia's rescue, succeeds "in re-animating her strength and her courage" (p.123), and she regains that serenity with which her spiritual life had, until the intrusion of Eugenio's news, recently equipped her. We know that her spiritual accomplishment (her disembodiment) is taking place when her singing voice is described as imparting "an idea of the music of angels".

Eugenio, however, seeks her out at the convent. He makes himself known by a strangulated cry, midway through a song she is singing at Mass – and suddenly, forcibly reembodyed, Virginia faints. Eugenio begs (in writing) for a secret meeting and they discover how they have been deceived by treacherous parents. Eugenio assures Virginia that the Cardinal can repeal her vows. The love that binds them is still overpoweringly strong, but Virginia does not want to simply flee with Eugenio (as would the typical Radcliffian Gothic heroine). "Virginia, terrified at the danger of such a step, opposed with all her power the proposition of Eugenio, and exerted her whole empire over him, in order to engage him to leave her at San Cipriano until he had obtained the Pope's dispensation from her vows": piety has taught her not to be an unthinking slave to passion. However, Eugenio's sensibility has not been refined by a cloister and he persuades Virginia back into the role of pursued female (back into, as it were, her contested, commodified body) by "the violence of [his] grief, his despair, his tears, his ardent prayers and entreaties not to abandon him to a state of despair, which he should be unable to survive" (p.150). It is fitting that she is forced out of her tranquil cloistered state into a situation fraught with danger, by a passionate display of overworked male sensibility. Against her better judgement, Virginia agrees to his plans for escape. But they go horribly wrong: she is found out by the new, cruel abbess and imprisoned in the underground vault from which she will never escape. Word is leaked to Eugenio that

she is dead. Again, sensibility brings disaster and narrative ‘punishment’ for the heroine who chose passion over God.

The narrative now follows Eugenio: his suicide attempt, rescue by a monk and entry, under a new name, into the monastery adjacent to Virginia’s convent (her supposed resting place). Here “his despair was succeeded by the most fervent piety” (p.167), and he becomes a type of the monks which we will discuss in chapter 5 who discover their true masculinity and nobility through piety, even though (in a trope that recalls Pope’s *Eloisa*) the image of their lost love haunts them “to the altar” (p.172). Eugenio is now no longer Eugenio, but Father Carlo: gentle, sorrowful, compassionate and beloved by the other monks. One day, he is called upon to give the last rites to a nun, who turns out to be Virginia, in a scene directly imitative of the last scene in *Comminge*. They recognize each other and Virginia dies joyfully in Father Carlo’s arms: reunited now as religious ‘brother’ and ‘sister’, a mirroring of their earlier ‘twinning’. The compassionate nun who has been nursing her gives him a narrative she has written of Virginia’s imprisonment (Sister Marcello Salviati is another Gothic nun who has the power to create narrative and tell her own part in Virginia’s ‘martyrdom’). In the narrative Virginia tries to escape her prison, and when her attempt to pass once more into the world fails, she focuses finally, utterly on God and achieves a divine peace:

“From that day Virginia, calm and resigned, appeared like an angel divested of all earthly incumbrance, and ready to take her flight to the bosom of the Divinity...Daily she prayed to her God not to relieve her from the griefs and regrets which the remembrance of her unhappy lover perpetually excited, but to grant her courage to bear them with resignation” (p.212).

Finally the heroine has reached a state of perfect liberation from passion. Immurement in the Gothic novel – claustrophobic, fatal – often feels like the ultimate irrevocable claim of the man on the woman’s body. The nun’s imprisonment following the invasion of her cloistered privacy by a man who covets her (usually without her even knowing), is a Gothic scenario we see time and again.¹ Indeed the nunnery in many Gothic novels is both a place of psychic freedom *and* punishment, and in these novels more often than not the whiff of anti-Catholicism and misogyny is strong (the nun is clearly being punished for trying to escape male purchase). However in *The Monk of the Grotto* whilst the tragedy is initiated by an Abbess other elements render a verdict of anti-Catholicism problematic: for example, the piety of Virginia in death and of Father Carlo as he blames himself for trying to take her from

¹ See for example *Evelina*’s imprisonment following Henry’s attempt to talk to her in the convent cloister in *The Abbey of Weyhill* by anon (London: 1805), Maddelina’s immurement in Ireland’s *The Abbess*.

God, and of Sister Salviati whose love is described so poignantly. Ultimately the vault – like the monastic “bed of ashes” upon which Emily is laid in *Lusignan* - is the place where the pious nun becomes a saint, disengaging herself totally from the self and handing her contested body and soul over to the care and forgiveness of God. Those who love her must worship her, too, in her transcendence. The superiority of the pious female is shown time and time again in novels of this type: she is rendered sublime, heroic and perfect when freed from the ties of sensibility and the claims of sexual ardour. Even loyalty to one’s parents is not upheld as a virtue equivalent to loyalty to one’s Church.

There are three incremental narrative strategies by which the author of *The Monk of the Grotto* suggests the momentum of Virginia’s spiritual liberation. First, from the vault Virginia manages to have her narrative told. Second, as if to show that in this space Virginia is finally free from all male claims on her body, it is only as the monk Father Carlo that Eugenio finally manages to gain access to her: in other words, when he has become to a certain extent feminized (see Chapter 5) and his claim on Virginia is no longer sexual but that of a fellow religious intent on helping her soul to God. And third, the author makes a martyr of Virginia in her final narrative moments: she gains a seraphic appearance and assumes a character of extreme penitence. Notably, Virginia is no longer scared of the vault at this point: her escape has been achieved within herself. In the following chapter, I will demonstrate how the Gothic hero-as-monk similarly moves through the confines of the Gothic castle without being held captive by it, either emotionally or physically. The recurring theme of these novels is that piety enables the hero/ine to find a direction through fearful Gothic landscapes and environments. Their piety - distinct from that which enables Radcliffe’s heroines to suffer the terrors of a place for a time - is worn as armour and shields them from the wounds and violations suffered by the conventional hero/ine.

In these novels, characters are psychologically disturbed and changed by their Gothic trials. In turn they transform their milieu. When Virginia finds freedom within herself the vault loses its threat. Cecilia, the Abbess and Emily, having moved beyond being victims of male collusion, find the cloister a place of serenity and achievement and life. For Radcliffe’s heroines on the other hand, the Gothic milieu is always a place of fearful stasis: a stasis out of which they have to physically be lifted (by a man), from which they never learn and by which they are never altered.

These novels, I suggest, challenge Gothic definitions. They question the meaning of immurement, because for the heroine in these novels convents, cloisters and vaults can serve as healing and liberating spaces. They change the role of the female heroine: she is

transformed from hyperfeminine or masculinized twin to the ‘feeling’ male (as feminist critics would have it) to paradigm of the value of piety in a world of unstable emotional forces. And most radically they challenge the position of the Catholic Church in the Gothic as the following novels clearly show.

The New Eloisa – *The English Nun* by Catherine Selden

In the hands of certain authors, the Gothic nun comes closer to what a modern viewpoint recognizes as a heroine. “The female Gothic novel” says Hoeveler, “represented women who ostensibly appear to be conforming to their acceptable roles within the patriarchy but who actually subvert the father’s power at every possible occasion and then retreat to studied postures of conformity whenever they risk exposure to public censure.” (Hoeveler, p.6). This is the resistance strategy that Hoeveler is arguing the popular novel was promoting. But what comes with the territory of the heroine’s happy ending (the companionate marriage, the providentially-realised nobility) is an enforced state of eternal adolescence. The heroine has to remain innocent of her goals in order to achieve them. She cannot become wise, she cannot be *knowing*, and this entails living “suspended in the realm of experience deferred, poised between childhood and adulthood, forever in the act of becoming someone” (Hoeveler, p.84). These novels were representing a reality: Mary Hays derides her generation’s affectation of “perpetual babyism” in *An Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* (1798). Previous criticism has strongly associated the perpetual babyism of the eighteenth-century female in life and literature with patriarchal fear of the female body.

The character of the Gothic nun whilst proffering a ‘studied posture of conformity’ similar to the Gothic heroine shows that a very real and sanctified sense of self can be won by looking *beyond* the ties of the body: by surrendering to the spirit. The grace to surrender to the spirit is only given or ‘won’ through being touched by experience and loss. Thus the Gothic nun experiences, matures and develops. If we are to have a fuller and more comprehensive picture of the Gothic, it is important that we establish that Gothic harbours many of these ‘modern’, progressive types of heroine.

A novel by Catherine Selden called *The English Nun, or the Sorrows of Edward and Louisa*, published in 1797 skilfully demonstrates the Gothic nun’s capacity to be a superior model of female self-possession. Little is known about Catherine Selden, except that she

wrote four other novels between 1797 and 1817.¹ However, certain historical details in the novel indicate Selden's knowledge of and sympathy for Catholic life in England. In the opening of *The English Nun*, for example, Selden calls attention to the indignities of the Penal Laws: the father of her heroine is sympathetically portrayed as "one of those few Scotch peers, who, persevering in the Catholic worship are excluded from all those offices, the income of which may serve to assist in supporting the dignity of the peerage, and at the same time permit the possessor to lay up a provision for younger children."² In highlighting that which Catholics suffered before the Relief Acts she is clearly showing a sympathy for them, which could suggest either that she was a Catholic or that she was simply answering a demand for an informed, tolerant and enlightened representation of the English Church's 'allies' in orthodoxy. But in other ways too, Selden highlights the necessity and nobility of her heroine's resistance in matters of faith. Louisa loses her lover because she refuses to put aside her Catholic identity.

Louisa, who as her name suggests is a modern-day Eloisa, is sent to be educated in a convent abroad. When, upon maturity, she returns home she has a "sedateness of manner" from "the seclusion of a cloister" (p.10) that marks her out from her "very fashionable, very vain...giddy and ignorant" boarding school peers (p.12). Here Selden illustrates contemporary social values again: from the letters of the Jerningham women, we learn that the daughters of titled Catholic families were much in demand in fashionable society because of their superior continental education and their ability to speak French - a desirable accomplishment. The very eligible Lord Edward Lumley falls in love with Louisa and she with him. Edward's anti-Catholic father, however, threatens Louisa and vows that he will renounce his son if she continues to exert her powers of attraction over him. Louisa, a strong heroine from the start, is mortified by his indelicacy and feels that both her "peace and honour" have been violated; she tells Edward that she can never marry him now. For Louisa, a Gothic heroine of exceptional resolve, with remarkable self-respect (no Radcliffian heroine would be so offended by a seething patriarch, nor so strong in her religious conviction, as to give up her boyfriend), the cloister is a more dignified place than the marriage market-place.

Accordingly she enters the English convent at Lisbon. Before taking the veil she writes to Edward's mother, prematurely calling herself Sister Louisa and warning that,

¹ *The Count de Santerre* (London, 1797); *Serena: a Novel* (London, 1800); *German Letters*, Translator (Cork 1804); *Villa Nova: or, The Ruined Castle; a Romance* (London 1805); *Villasantelle: or, The Curious Impertinent; a Romance* (London, 1817)

² Catharine Selden, *The English Nun: a Novel*, 1797, (New York: 1806), p.1.

although the memory of Edward causes her considerable pain, “All my future thoughts must be of heaven” (p.108). Louisa even arranges to take the black veil immediately, “that when Lord Edward was informed whither she had retired, he might at the same time learn that her destiny was unchangeable; and thence be more quickly reconciled to their eternal separation”. And this “with a composed and pious dignity, that was almost saintly” she does (p.109). Poor Edward is forced into the unlikely role of an Abelard: “I have seen you for the last time, Louisa. I have seen you devote yourself to God; and I will no longer seek to draw your thoughts from Him, to a wretch like me!”(p.110). But the single-minded Louisa is only momentarily shaken: “Louisa wept sadly over this billet; but resignation soon conquered her regrets: or at least taught her not to indulge them.” Resignation is an important concept in all these novels: it is of course a primary ingredient in the position that Hoeveler argues is advocated for the heroine throughout the ‘female gothic’ – that of wise-passiveness, a form of passive aggression. But whereas Hoeveler’s reading of the ‘gothic feminist’ heroine sees her as functioning always on a covert level – “the heroine manages, inadvertently of course, to cause the death of these patriarchs” – to bring about the “female-created fantasy” of the authoress (p. 7), the nuns in these novels move from resignation to open displays of strength and resistance to patriarchal and social violations. Resignation, in other words, develops into strength: the heroine overtly matures and grows under its influence.

Selden, like Sleath, sees the convent as a place not simply for the renunciation of selfhood but the development of selfhood. Selden’s Louisa is an exemplary nun in more ways than one. When forced to leave the convent on business, she unexpectedly finds herself once more in Edward’s presence and proves herself “superior to all the weaknesses of her sex”: whilst Edward is so traumatized that he has to be supported by an old retainer, Louisa “without any signs of visible emotion....gave her hand to Lord Edward, and congratulated his return,¹ as if he had been only an old friend” (p.12). Louisa, now emotionally superior to Edward the ‘man of feeling’, has been changed by experience and sorrow into an individual who is defined by the strength of her convictions, not a weak body; who relies on self-sufficiency, not on her male counterpart.² Hoeveler might argue that Louisa is simply a

¹ Rather than show her how much he is suffering, and thus cause her to suffer more, Edward had run away to Switzerland.

² See Ireland’s *The Abbess*, Vol II, p.284, for another feat of female usurpation. Maddelena is inspired and fortified throughout the novel, and particularly during her trial before the Inquisition, not by the memory of her lover the Conte (who is to blame for her troubles) but by a superior example of strength, the dead nun Marrietta. Interestingly, Maddeline wears Marrietta’s crucifix as a constant reminder of the piety of her friend and kisses it at stressful moments. It is the equivalent of the miniature of lover or father that the Gothic heroine wears in her breast and refers to for melancholy inspiration.

man's woman – a girl who has out-masculinised the men, part of the “androgynous compulsion” of the late eighteenth century (Hoeveler, p.92). But Louisa's strength is spiritual not androgynous. Hers is the strength of Eloisa, whose sense of survival does not come from an urge to adopt male habits of behaviour, but from a compulsion – however incompletely achieved in the poetic narrative - to achieve spiritual excellence *for herself* and reap the rewards of the “blameless vestal”: “O grace serene! Oh virtue heav'nly fair!” (line 297). Of course, the real-life Héloïse, according to historical accounts, did achieve this spiritual excellence and was much admired as an abbess. Selden seems to be clearly suggesting that devotion to the doctrines of the Church can shape a woman into a superior model of strength formidably able to resist the indignities of weakness and morbid sensibility.

Edward's father is now dead, and Edward, as if bearing a great gift tells Louisa that he has found a way she can be absolved from her vows so that they can be together and end his terrible misery. Louisa demurs:

“Were it for any good or necessary purpose,” returned she, “perhaps [the church] might [dissolve my vows]; but when the desire of being freed from them arises from those very passions I have vowed to banish from my heart, how shall I hope for absolution? But, Edward, I will be more candid with you. I do not believe it is in the power of man to remit vows made to God....when I devoted myself to his worship, I called on him to behold and ratify my oath, and nothing can excuse my breaking it....do not you, whom I have loved and trusted, lead me to destruction!” (p.164)

It is interesting that Louisa sees Edward as leading her to destruction – not just the destruction of her honour of course, but of her eternal soul. Selden's moral judgement is unforgiving: loyalty to the Church is a matter of considerable gravity. And Louisa is no Virginia: despite falling to her knees and sobbing at the sight of his misery, she chooses God over Edward. Edward has no option but to witness her transformation: “Glorious, matchless Louisa!...No, thou perfect angel, never from this moment shall you hear my ill-fated love. I will look up to you as a superior being, who has deigned to feel an interest in my fate.” (p.165) Louisa “the elevation of her soul beaming in her eyes” merely replies:

“No, Edward....Consider me as your sister. Fancy that I am the one you most loved, risen from the grave, and then I shall glory in your affection.” (p.165)

In this moment, when Louisa suggests a sisterly alliance to her former lover, Selden's heroine is not only proving a pious example to the weak, vacillating male, but she is also suggestive of a relationship between the male and female in which the female manages and

directs the terms of their physical interaction. In other words, she controls both her body and his. In this way we see Selden creating a heroine who is upholding the culture's insistence on women acting as an example to the men in their family in matters of spirituality, morality, sexuality. Unlike the Gothic nuns we have discussed so far, Selden's nun is demanding that Edward not only accept but love her disembodied, self-possessed self. Having physically eluded him, she then suggest he love her in spirit form ("Fancy that I am the one you most loved, risen from the grave"). And from a distance of miles, too: when Edward begs her at least to stay in England as a nun, she again demurs: "I am sorry, Edward...that even in this one instance I cannot oblige you. I have given my solemn promise to our Lady Abbess to return to my Convent; and..my engagement shall be sacred" (p.176). It is notable how Selden manages to show how strong Louisa's love for Edward is, at the same time as showing how much stronger her spiritual integrity and loyalty to her Church and her sisters is. And because she has made Edward a hero of relatively ambiguous merit –a true man of feeling, his first instinct upon losing Louisa was to flee to Switzerland, home of Rousseau during his exile (there is reference this fact in the narrative: the comparison between Edward and Rousseau is plainly made) – the reader is invited to agree with Louisa that the convent deserves her more.

And the 'Church' welcomes her home: Louisa is embraced as a heroine by the nuns as one who "has so nobly resisted all the temptations of the world, and has returned to edify our society" (p.181). She replaces the worthy abbess who had died in her absence, and "never was there a superior who enjoyed such absolute dominion over the conduct and affections of the nuns" (p.182). Again the nun's successful domination of the passions earns her true 'nobility' and a role as leader of the community. Edward, who did not manage to conquer his passion with religion on the other hand, is not allowed to survive (he goes off to fight in a foreign war and is killed). Years later, after a full life, Louisa looks forward to being united with Edward in heaven: "He expects me in a better world, and I hasten to rejoin him." She has successfully dictated the course of their union, from beginning to end! "Holy [and] elevating" in death, Louisa's friends hold up "as an example to their daughters the Virtues of the ENGLISH NUN" (p.188).

Selden's novel suggests that future generations can learn priceless lessons from the pious virtues and religious practices of this new Eloisa. In Selden's novel the convent teaches an English girl superior grace and self-control. But then it also infuses her with the determination not to undervalue herself, but to move in an unassailable space, a spiritual dimension. Her convent education gives Louisa a desire to be treated differently; her convent life allows her to strive for a higher sense of all things. Selden gives us a heroine who thinks

seriously about religion (“I do not believe it is in the power of man to remit vows made to God”). And it is through thinking seriously about religion that she flourishes, whilst her male counterpart destroys himself. These are the “Virtues” that Louisa’s friends pass on to their female children.

Selden’s Gothic world is distinct from those we have looked at so far in this study. The drawing rooms and English country gardens of Selden’s narrative are more like *Northanger Abbey* than La Trappe. Like Austin, Selden is commenting on English society, with her tale of an English girl who chooses a foreign cloister because her options at home are unappealing. Selden brings the Gothic cloister narrative ‘home’ with her English nun. In so doing she presents a striking example of a writer exploring middle- and upper-class English attitudes to Catholicism in English culture at this time. Her moral sentiments throughout mirror the way Catholicism evokes for the Anglican faithful the value of tenacity to orthodox Christianity, the moral strength to be gained from it. Indeed a sense of the English public’s sympathy for Catholicism permeates the novel: its heroine is an English nun and by 1797 English nuns were a reality once more as monasteries and convents were allowed to resettle on English soil. On many levels Selden’s novel represents the toleration of Catholic rehabilitation in England by and for a sympathetic conservative reading public.

Mother Superior: *The Abbess of Valtiera or, The Sorrows of a Falsehood* by Agnes Lancaster.

We see virtues similar to those of Selden’s English nun recurring in the character of the Abbess of Valtiera, the central figure in a novel of the same name published in 1816 by Agnes Lancaster (unfortunately Lancaster is a novelist whose biography seems to have disappeared from history). In *The Abbess of Valtiera or, The Sorrows of a Falsehood* we find the same portrayal of religious enthusiasm as an heroic, meritorious trait for women. It seems likely that the ideology behind the theme, which emerged in the 1790s as part of a counterrevolutionary discourse, was being given added currency in the 1800s by the growth of Evangelicalism. The novel was published during the conflict over Catholic Emancipation which marked the 1810s and 1820s, and Lancaster can in places be accused of pro-Catholic pamphleteering. Protestantism tends to be demonized,¹ whilst the good characters are all Catholics. Lancaster is at pains to demonstrate the integrity, impartiality and justice of her Catholic characters, not to mention their loyalty to King and country. Her nuns, for example,

¹ Agnes Lancaster, *The Abbess of Valtiera; or the Sorrows of a Falsehood* (London: 1816), pp1-104, Vol. II p.176, Vol. III p.66, Vol. IV p.164.

are told to “be subservient” to the law (i.e. the constitution) whilst carrying out their monastic ordinances (p.167). Moreover the Abbess of the title is not some fiendish female in league with an equally evil monk, as are the abbesses of the anti-Catholic tradition upheld by Maturin and Ireland. Rather she is a ‘modern’ heroine who conquers her weaknesses and becomes idolized by society.

As a child Agatha was a rather resilient and exotic flower of Gothic maidenhood:

Agatha was by nature active, rather than quiescent, from her very childhood; and even where simple obedience was required from her, she ever went beyond, or fell short of the letter of the law. Commanding in her person, twin-sister with an impetuous and warlike youth, her early sports, and even studies, partook the nature of his; but a sense of what was due to the delicacy of her sex and rank, rather than a consciousness of its weakness, controlled this spirit in advancing life, and turned her pursuits rather to the arts which embellish life, than the learning which enriches it. In whatever she undertook she excelled, and there were certainly times in which her brother had as great an inclination to remove her from envy, as either avarice or ambition; but the excessive partiality with which she regarded him, the anxiety she manifested even to decorate him with the graces of her own mind, and apply the benefit of her own studies to his use, conquered this disposition in him, and impelled him to love even that which he felt to be superior. Had he remained under the paternal roof, it is probable that with such a friend, who was imperceptibly his mistress, every other error would have been overcome (p.129).

Agatha is an advanced model of the late eighteenth-century ideal of ‘new’ femininity: a woman superior in every way to the ‘warlike’ youth, her brother, who devotes her time and remarkable energy to monitoring and improving him. It would seem, with her “active spirit, and that warm attachment which she felt to whatever was worthy, or capable of becoming worthy, in human nature; the instinctive desire she felt for universal knowledge, philosophical research, and even heroic design” she is destined for a wonderful career at the helm of the domestic flagship of new morality, the middle-class home:

In the duties of her station, as a woman of rank, a wife, and a mother, her ardent spirit might exercise its powers, her expansive mind spread forth to bless and be blessed; to a suffering husband she could be a shield, to him who struggled with wayward fortune a sword, to congenial talents an inestimable companion, to drooping worth a friend (p.131).

Why then does she end up in a convent?

In what happens next to Agatha, Lancaster seems to be suggesting that the patriarchal world of the romantic market place is not good enough for such an amazon. In Louisa,

Selden created a heroine whose exceptional qualities could not, and indeed should not, have to bear the indignities of manipulation by men of the world. In the same way Lancaster obviates the necessity for Agatha to become a mere helpmeet to such a man, by having her brother miserably betray her. Agatha is cheated both out of her property and the prospect of a happy marriage to a poor nobleman, by the witless ingrate upon whom she lavished all her early talents and gifts. On being informed by her brother that her lover has married another, Agatha enters a convent and takes the veil. Later like Virginia she finds that she was tricked, and by a family member whom she loved and trusted to protect her. Male protection is something of a fallacy in this novel.¹ Lancaster makes her heroine take advantage of her *own* strengths and virtues. Agatha turns to the practice of “that self-denial and self-command” which notably Lancaster defines as “the highest gifts of religion, and the surest proofs of its existence” (p.167). Lancaster’s angry nun treats the convent like a boot-camp. Gone is the melancholy aspect of the cloister –Agatha does not float around the cedars weeping and sighing. She throws herself into disciplinary activity in the form of “overstrained penance and mortification, by which she sought to subdue her unhappy passion for Antonio, her vindictive anger at him whose treachery wounded still less in its effect than its act, for she was no less a sister than a lover” (p.131).

Lancaster’s is the first of the nuns we have come across for whom anger and sorrow in equal measure constitutes the enemy that devotion must conquer. She is the first to approach penance in a rage. The representation of religion has gained some dimension here: it is no longer mere consolation to be passively received, it is a physical engine of change, a sword to be wielded. We can find parallels between Lancaster’s attitude to religion in terms of her heroine’s progression, and religion’s role in society in her time. In the era in which Lancaster was writing, Catholicism had gained in strength and infrastructure. It no longer had the glamour of a lost cause: it was not something that could be romanticized or rendered with nostalgia in quite the same way. Lancaster’s representation, therefore, has little of the romantic dream of devotion that Sleath’s had in 1797. The cloister is a practical place in which practical things can be achieved. And here we find another parallel: under the Evangelistic leadership of Wilberforce, “the dream of a national reformation of manners” had to a certain extent been achieved.² Rather than a commodity to be nurtured, cherished, protected therefore, religion had been exercised and proven to be an instrument of change –

¹ Rosa, Antonio’s mother, is also betrayed and abandoned by her husband and has to fend for herself. She, too, uses religious practices to train her in strength and self-sufficiency and to provide protection: she takes to the road as a pilgrim.

² See V. Kiernan, “Evangelicalism and the French Revolution”, *Past and Present*, 1 (February 1952): pp.44 -56.

which is how Lancaster's heroine approaches it.

Her military-style application to her vocation soon earns Agatha the respect and consideration of the other sisters and the love of the abbess, who sees the pain behind the endeavour. The abbess "was sensible that her establishment had declined since she entered on her present appointment" and she recognises in the "intelligent, pious and energetic Agatha" a "powerful" woman who could manage the position more effectively (p.132). But first, Agatha has to learn to love again. Lancaster makes it clear that one should not forget tenderness in the enthusiastic development of the spirit. Agatha has placed herself "at an unapproachable height": "her nightly vigils, her unwearied prayers, her long readings", whilst bringing her closer to a saintly ideal, alienate her from the younger nuns. She lacks warmth, for "with the power and the affections of love and philanthropy peculiarly strong in her heart, she yet loved no human being, save indeed the holy mother" (p.135-136). The love and importantly the "philanthropy" in Agatha's heart have to be released. Philanthropy is a significant word here, as the stimulation of the flow of charity in society was one of Wilberforce's main tasks, and England was at this time priding itself on its unprecedented levels of philanthropic funding (Kiernan, p. 52).

The opportunity to love again, without having to return to the romantic marketplace, presents itself in the form of an abandoned child. The child, son of a Scottish beauty called Rosa and a Spanish nobleman, might or might not be the heir to the English throne. The mother, Rosa, had to break her journey to England in order to give birth (her husband is hurrying on ahead, intent on presenting himself and his wife at the court; he is another weak male character drawn to underline the nugatoriness of male protection). In her haste to catch up with her husband, Rosa begs the abbess to keep her child for the time being. Though the abbess does not feel equal to the task, she sees a momentary glimpse "of awakened sensibility" in Agatha; and asks her if, being "young (and) powerful" she will raise the child in secret (p.139).

The boy Antonio benefits immeasurably from his conventual upbringing (he will be discussed in the next chapter on the Gothic monk). Agatha who has now become Abbess flourishes as a mother. Indeed motherhood makes her an excellent nun. In the beginning, motherhood presents a challenge to her vows and to her devotions, which should be to God only. When Rosa's messenger comes back to take the child, she cannot bear to give him up and learning that Rosa has since had another child, implies that Antonio did not survive his mother's absence. Immediately she repents her falsehood, but cannot find the boy's parents again to put things right. The maternal instinct is represented as potentially damaging in these

two 'mothers,' Rosa and Agatha. The implication that natural sentiment or sensibility is untrustworthy has never been so radically extended as in this novel, where the maternal instinct itself is called into moral and psychological question. What does Lancaster suggest a good mother should be, if maternal instincts can be selfish and destructive? A mother superior. As atonement for her falsehood, Agatha decides to excel as the abbess. She extends her maternal capacities beyond her immediate offspring to the wider world around her. She not only takes excellent care of her monastic family, but becomes a champion of the causes of the poor. Leasing out "at easy rents" convent land and "(waging) legal war with the highest grandee who infringed the property or alienated the vassals of her lands," she succours "the lowest peasant who wanted her protection, or sought her support" (p.166-167). Her developed spirituality produces a powerful, wide-reaching maternal embrace. Her business attributes seem masculine – but this is really Lancaster's triumph: in Agatha, Lancaster shows how a woman can be all things and yet belong to nobody, except God. The narrative implies that a strong commitment to religion on the part of the individual brings liberation and improvement to all human lives.

But of course, Agatha is a paradox. She is active in the patriarchal world of feudal land-leasing and legal representation of the poor and she is not afraid to be there. But she is only able to be there because she is operating from without, having removed herself from the sphere of patriarchal influence to a community of women where she can be in control. Likewise she is the ideal model of motherhood, imbuing her son with all the very best pious virtues: but only because she has developed herself through sanctity, has escaped all male claims on her body, and is not limited to nursing one man or one family, but can extend herself for the greater good of society. In the characterization of Agatha, Lancaster is depicting a fantasy of female empowerment. What can female readers take from this? A nineteenth-century woman could not be a mother without first belonging to a man, she could not have knowledge without moving in spheres of patriarchal dominance. Is Lancaster *really* only demonstrating the utter dependence of women on patriarchy in nineteenth-century England?

I would argue not, basing my argument on the novel's conclusion. After facing many moral and physical challenges, which he always meets admirably (he is his "high-soul'd" mother's son), Antonio is reunited with his real family and finds out that he is not the grandson of the king, in fact his father is Agatha's brother, the Duke of Antequera. Antonio pledges himself to Angela, a young boarder at the convent with whom he fell in love when he was a boy. She has turned out to be the daughter of Agatha's first love. Agatha, too, has

faced a terrible trial: she has been tried and acquitted by the Inquisition. The Inquisition had been informed that Agatha had a son and obviously believed that she had flouted her vows. However her brother, the Duke of Antequera, gave conclusive evidence that secured her freedom and thus absolved himself of his vile crimes against her. In the final scene she is reunited in happiness and celebration with her family and her ex-lover. The way she calmly welcomes him signifies that she has made her peace with him, too (p.217).

The Duke, meanwhile, mourns his treacherous decision to trick Agatha into a convent:

While this conversation took place, her own extensive family of nuns and novices crowded together, and impatiently eyed the group who kept her from their warm caresses; and the Duke of Antequera, in witnessing how much she was revered and beloved, and how widely her beneficent spirit diffused blessings around it, felt a severe pang in thinking that he had deprived the world of such an ornament, and married life of such an example, as she would doubtless have afforded...he addressed the captain...declaring that nothing could exceed the cruelty and wickedness of immuring for life a woman who was born to bless and enjoy the most extensive circle of society.

The Duke is so short-sighted that he cannot yet see what the reader clearly recognizes – that such a “beneficent spirit” was not made to ‘diffuse blessings’ to her own social circle alone! Lancaster has created a heroine whose philanthropic sway reaches “the lowest peasant” – a true heroine. But naturally the Duke assumes – as he would - that the world is more important than the cloister, and his friend the captain agrees:

“I am precisely of your grace’s opinion, and I sincerely thank God that in my country we have no nunneries to tempt a man to such a sin. I have five sisters and while I can fire a gun, or reef a sail, not one shall hide her innocent head in a prison of any kind.” The abbess, in the blunt answer of the generous Englishman, learned the complaint which had awakened it; she fixed her eyes upon her household, and bursting from them, hastened towards her own family, who, of course, were forbidden by their rules to approach the place...

Her “own family” are, of course, her nuns; and Lancaster’s description recalls the crowds in the gospels receiving Christ himself:

As she approached, the cry of triumph, the burst of joy, broke forth uncontrolled; they crowded around her, they wept over her, they kissed the very hem of her garment..At length, the abbess prevailed upon them to retire, and spreading over them her extended arms, she once more pronounced the holy benediction, which was not less the effusion of her piety than the proof of her authority. With this blessing they all departed, save one aged nun, who had been temporary abbess

during the period of Agatha's suspense and disgrace- taking from her waist that golden cross which was the badge of her office, she returned it, saying, with a devout and steadfast voice – "Bear witness for me, ye blessed saints! that, with pure joy, I restore this to the hand of her who receives it, thankful that I shall again dwell beneath her authority, and rejoice in her protection."

Agatha's "effusion of piety" upholds her position of "authority", and both come together in a "holy benediction". Piety supports order - a clear signposting of Lancaster's position. "Authority" and "protection" are not services the Gothic female is ordinarily ever at liberty to offer; but Lancaster has managed to incorporate in the figure of Agatha many uncommon strengths – impartial – i.e. perfect - maternal love, superior leadership skills, formidable self-discipline, courage, self-esteem - most of which were learned in the cloister and sprang from religious devotion. The next paragraph - the climax of Agatha's story – is swathed in sublime pious sentiment and imagery:

She now withdrew, and at the same instant the pealing organ was heard from the church, and the voices of the virgin train sounded through the mighty dome, giving glory to God for the delivery of their beloved mother....With clasped hands, and tears that slowly stole from her uplifted eyes, the abbess and her friends listened to the sacred song, and with soaring hearts ascended to the divine presence...As the swelling organ and the full tide of happy voices sunk to a gentle cadence, the holy mother thus addressed the noble penitent, her still-beloved..brother:..... "Behold my family, witness the love they bear me, and ask your own heart if I am not blest? And should you think that in so wide a circle the love is too much diffused to yield particular and individual comfort, think what I feel for Antonio..no, my brother! Grieve not for me – I am happy, and...can rejoice that the wishes of early life were unfulfilled.." (pp.217-221).

The heroine-nun's achievement subordinates the companionate marriage of the conventional Gothic heroine. The nun is worshipped, beatified – the 'gothic feminist' is merely serenaded by peasants at her wedding, at which point the narrative is abruptly cut off before we can learn what her life is going to be like. In this paragraph Lancaster, like Sleath, uses the traditional sentimental tropes: the reference to the Guido Magdalen ("tears that slowly stole from her uplifted eyes"), and the song of the nuns sounding like the 'chaunt of angels', and lifting the soul "to the divine presence". But Lancaster outdoes convention. The scene reaches dizzy heights of pious sentiment, as the abbess reaches "through the grate" to the peasantry who "ran tumultuously towards her..knelt before her..kissed the bars which enclosed her and blessed the very ground which supported her" pp.225-226). The captain is forced to eat his words:

“Never, never..could I have believed that a nun had such power of diffusing happiness! – God knows! My only contrivance, an hour ago, was to seize the abbess, put her in a boat on the Ebro, and row her down to my own ship..but now I see plainly I should have torn her from the happiness I sought to secure her ..”
(p.226)

Lancaster’s heroine has become supremely powerful by surpassing the minutiae of feminine conformity and aiming for a greater, a divine, understanding of life. The result - the absolute veneration of Agatha - makes the maneuverings of patriarchy seem trivial and ridiculous. The captain’s plan to bundle her into a rowing boat seems ludicrous: her brother’s regret that she was denied a nice marriage is laughable. Agatha towers above their tiny, busy, commodifying world like a goddess above the agora. Being cloistered in Lancaster’s Gothic world is not a symbol of resignation to oppression, but of undreamed-of power.

Obviously these Gothic writers – Sleath, Selden, Lancaster – are not suggesting that every woman should become a nun, although their work does at times seem to suggest that peace can only be felt in the solitude of the cloister, in holy retirement. But they do present, in the characterization of female holy devotion, a picture of self-command and self-possession that goes beyond simple domestic feminine virtue, the sort that is necessary to maintain a good home, to a spirituality that may be necessary to maintain the soul: the self. The survival technique of the Gothic nun is to reclaim her soul from male possession. Her great triumph as a heroine is in recognising the soul’s – and thus the self’s - sublime power.

Each novel approaches this idea in a different way. Sleath, writing at the height of cultural sentimentalization of England’s medieval past, romanticizes monasticism and renders Catholic devotion, rite and ritual, sublime. *The Monk of the Grotto* concentrates on the tragic potential of the conflict between monastic vows and earthly love - a popular theme since Pope’s *Eloisa* – the tragic Virginia finding liberty on her deathbed when she finally chooses God. Selden and Lancaster create heroines whose monastic vows enable them to survive and thrive. The men in their narratives who are either feminized men of feeling or over-masculinized villains, tend to either self-destruct (in the case of the former) or look on in awe (in the case of the latter). The significance of these novels is that they are engaging significant moral/theological and social/political discourses whilst remaining distinctively Gothic.

Criticism tends to resist readings of the Gothic as a conservative form: yet these novels present us with a thoroughly critical perspective on sensibility and a didactic Christian ‘schema’ in the shape of a pro-Catholic/pro-Church discourse. They also offer a new type of

Gothic heroine who challenges our picture of Gothic further. Convents in these novels are not symbols of the superstition, oppression and corruption of the Catholic Church. They are not anachronistic institutions from which enlightened democratic Protestant England is thankfully far removed. Rather, convents are presented as feminine havens where strength and dignity can be restored, or schools in and from which might be learned the value and power of a Christian moral foundation in a cruel world. Nor is the nun a 'suffering victim' acting as a decorative adjunct to the heroine's narrative. On the contrary, these novels present heroines who sustain a narrative about the power of piety. Through actively achieving self-possession they represent the sort of feminist principles that critics argue the conventional Gothic heroine only "masquerades".

CHAPTER 5

The Monk as Hero, the Hero as Monk

“True heroism is meek, is lowly: not vaunting in idle words, in boasting phrases, in noisy asseverations... you would be an avenger; change it and become a Christian.”
Louisa Sidney Stanhope, *The Confessional of Valombre*¹

The last chapter showed how the character of the nun is used in certain Gothic novels to illustrate the sublimity of Christian piety, and the superiority of orthodox Christian virtues over sensibility. Female characters who embody resignation and piety are shown to survive the vicissitudes of fate and to achieve autonomy and influence in the wider world. I suggest that these novelists appropriated the highly popular Gothic form to promote orthodox Christian beliefs and the building of strong Christian moral foundations. Thus the Gothic novel became, in places, a vehicle of counterrevolutionary religious sentiment. This discovery problematizes the assertions of previous scholarship which has denied the Gothic form a religious dimension or function. Moreover, these novels clearly show that sympathetic literary representations of Catholicism were fairly routine both during and after the 1790s, and that the Gothic was a place for them. These representations may well be connected to the political and social rehabilitation of the reputation of Catholicism at this time; nonetheless sentimentally sympathetic representations and appropriations of Catholicism had always been part of English culture.

We might expect that the man of feeling, that hero of unbridled passions, would have been portrayed as dangerously out of date in this era of conservative reaction to the Jacobin excesses of the Revolution. And indeed certain novels, such as Selden's *English Nun* demonstrate that this was the case. Agnes Maria Bennet in her novel *Agnes de Courci* (1797) shows women – significantly, conventual women, not typical ‘secular’ heroines – proving much stronger, wiser and more instinctive than the conventional hero of sensibility. Harley is a child of nature, tepid in his religious beliefs, who models himself after young Werther (and shares his name with Mackenzie's man of feeling). He is a wilful and rather aimless recluse, criticized by everyone for his way of life, until he falls for the beautiful, pious Agnes.

¹ Louisa Sidney Stanhope, *The Confessional of Valombre, a Romance* in 4 vols. (London, 1812), Vol. I, p.51. Further references will generally be to page numbers only, and given in the text.

Unfortunately, Harley blindly believes a vicious rumour about Agnes, which drives her to flee in shame to take the veil at the convent of her dearest friend, the saintly Abbess Lawrence. Having searched, anguished, for Agnes at various convents, Harley faints at the feet of one nun who states “your’s is a poor nervous system; I pity you!”¹ Harley eventually finds Agnes and persuades her to marry him. But Agnes will not do so without the blessing of Abbess Lawrence who cannot endorse a marriage to an “amiable heretic”. In this, the novel deviates greatly from the standard romance plot, for the Abbess points out the nugatoriness of the wealth and title – the usual prizes of the sentimental/gothic heroine - that Agnes will gain with marriage. “She considered them as snares that might in time undermine the principles of the religion, on which, in the opinion of all good Catholics, the salvation of Agnes depended”. The Abbess writes:

‘Oh tell me not of the merit, the worth, the graces of the insinuating Harley; the riches, the honor, and splendor that awaits thy union with him: I know them all: - but, Agnes, hast thou well considered it? This man may lead you through life; he may strew thy path with rose leaves, whose velvet down may conceal the pointed thorn beneath; - but again I say, hast thou considered? Art thou aware that thou canst not enter the presence of our God with him?’ (Vol.IV, p.77).

Harley has indeed been ‘insinuating’ throughout. The Abbess’ use of language here suggests that he is not all he seems – she envisions huge romantic gestures that “conceal” dangers. Perfect love means nothing in this novel if it is at the expense of religious beliefs. Mother Lawrence is afraid that Harley will “pervert’ Agnes and that she, Mother Lawrence, “will eternally lose her”. She speaks soberly in a letter to Harley: “.. ‘seek not to weaken the faith of my child...presume not..to place thy image between Agnes and her crucifix – thy power, between my sister and her redeemer”” (Vol.IV, p.79). Agnes’ reply is uneasy: she admits “*I know not, but I do feel, [my heart] should be devoted to God*”” (Vol.IV, p.91). Agnes clearly has a pious character. But passion and the strong, emotional demonstrations of Harley, persuade her away from it. However finally her instinct, and that of the Abbess who envisioned thorns concealed beneath the roses of Harley’s love, is right: Harley turns out to be Agnes’ brother! Bennet uses the common Gothic motif of incest to signify the acute and actual peril into which the man of feeling was about to lead Agnes. Even in death, Harley is not spared Bennet’s Christian denunciation, for he commits suicide, plunging himself, as the Abbess says, into eternal sin. And Agnes, who chose Harley over God, also dies, consumed

¹ Agnes Maria Bennett, *Agnes de Courci A Domestic Tale* (London, 1797), Vol.III, p.66.

by anguish, sorrow and regret. There is no happy ending in Bennet's Gothic world for the heroine who strays from the pious path and the advice of the righteous!

It is not that the man of feeling was completely out of fashion by the end of the century, rather that moral adjustments were being made to him. Feminist critics and critics of sensibility have long been fascinated by the phenomenon of the feminized or womanly hero: a widespread literary type that, as Hoeveler rightly says, was reflecting the culture's attempt to "create a new type of gendered being, a person who embodied the best stereotyped qualities of both sexes" (Hoeveler, p.90). However the type formed in the 1760s, 70s and 80s under the compulsion to find some sort of moderate ground on which men and women could stand as equals was not a type that could be adequately described as supportive of conservative notions of stability and order in the more troubled 1790s. Thus we see heroines – the nuns of the last chapter - whose strength comes from an extreme regimen of chastity, humility, etc., virtues that keep a woman from behaving too much like a man. And we see heroes whose sensibility is likewise curbed and refined by an extreme regimen of Christian virtues: in the hero's case, chivalric virtues. Chivalry was, of course, of ideological importance to the conservative majority, precisely because it challenged notions of equality, individualism and self-interest - qualities they saw as Jacobin ideals.

In the 1790s the figure of the monk was beginning to impose on the Gothic narrative as never before. Because he is defined by piety and chastity the monk evokes the first commandment of chivalry: "Thou shalt believe all that the Church teaches, and shalt observe all its directions."¹ In many novels, the monk - habitually a nobleman who has taken monastic vows because he has suffered in love, like the monks of the French cloister theme – sustains a heroic narrative of his own, shaped by a Christian moral code, in which he puts into practice sublime acts of resignation, forgiveness and mercy. His deeds are often described in chivalric terms – as noble, honourable.

Eugenio in his role as Father Carlo (in *The Monk of the Grotto*), and the Duke de Meronville in *Lusignan* are good examples of 'monkish' heroism. Meronville enters a monastery because he believes his beloved Emily, from whom he was stolen the night before their wedding by a cruel trick, is now dead and, like Abelard, he hopes that "the offices of religion...might eventually banish love from his apostate heart". The plan does not work, however, and he remains obsessed with Emily - "I yet burn – I bow to heaven – but Emily alone I adore!" (p.200) – an obsession for which he will pay. Meronville learns one day that

¹ See Léon Gautier, *Chivalry* (London: New York, 1891).

Emily still lives, and his friend Dorimond offers to help him escape. Until now, Meronville has been a conventional Gothic hero: separated from his female counterpart by evil relatives, imprisoned in a dungeon and now in a cloister, always a slave to his love, his passions and his trembling sensibility. But at this point, he undergoes a tortured metaphysical struggle: the struggle of Eloisa and of Abelard, of Theodosius, and Comminge. This struggle transforms him into a religious hero. He urges heaven's aid: "Shades of departed saints, leave your sacred receptacles, and come to my relief..oh, save me, Heaven!" (p.212). He sees phantoms who warn him of the dire consequences of breaking his vows to God, and Emily herself appears in a dream to him, begging him to repent of any notion of leaving the monastery for her (p.220). There is a moment when we wonder whether Meronville will, like a conventional Gothic hero, dismiss the mysterious signs as superstitious nonsense and claim the girl. However he takes heed of the portents, demonstrating how a faith in mysteries becomes, in the hands of certain Gothic authors, a heroic virtue: "It must be so! Great God, receive me! Yes, I will banish that image I adore – which shares my heart, and disputes its empire with thee! ..Heaven has made me its own!" (p.213-214). Finally "restored to myself, reconciled to my Creator", he offers Emily to Dorimond as a wife. This we cannot imagine a conventional Gothic hero ever doing. But despite his sacrifice, God has more trials in store for poor Meronville. Another tortured brother, Brother Ambrose, turns out to be Emily herself, disguised. She is dying. On her deathbed, she wills Meronville to adhere to his new principles: " 'God chastens but to shew his love!...Let my death be the instrument of salvation! ..forget me, banish my image, and make place for God! – obey his voice – submit to his will! ' (ps. 227, 236, 237)".¹ It is a harsh lesson that this 'hero' learns. His is a new sort of heroic experience for the lover in the English novel – one that, before these Gothic novels, was only explored in poetry and tragic drama in the English literary tradition. This cowed hero makes the belief in and sacrifice to higher things heroic. He is a novelistic invention designed to appeal to and shape the views of the conservative reader sympathetic to Christian moral reformation as ballast against the insinuation of 'free-thinking' and 'free-feeling'. Similarly Father Carlo/Eugenio in *The Monk of the Grotto* subordinates despair to "the most fervent piety" (p.167). His story unfolds much like Meronville's.

In *The Friar's Tale* (1792), which has already been mentioned in chapter 3 with reference to *The Italian* and its treatment of the Church's protection of assassins, an actively heroic monk is juxtaposed against an inactive and rather unheroic young man of sensibility.

¹ The previous chapter discussed Emily in terms of her role as a self-confessed victim of sensibility.

This friar is also presented as a representative Christian hero, signifying the power and importance of Christian devotion. As in all of the works discussed here, the discourse of conventualism conveys the sublimity and necessity of Christian devotion.

The French friar of the title tells the narrator, an English traveller, a “pathetic narrative” (p.12) about the trials of two separated young lovers and his part in their reunion. As in *The Monk of the Grotto*, it is the machinations of an evil abbess that motivate much of the plot. But whilst her presence suggests that monastic institutions harbour evil-doers, it is counterbalanced by the friar whose actions and words ultimately validate monastic institutions and the sanctuary they provide. In this tale, Matilda and Albert are prevented from marrying by Matilda’s cruel father, who rather than see his wealth go to the honest but poor Albert, secludes Matilda in a convent and bequeaths his estate to his evil nephew Conrad. Albert flees to a nearby monastery (the monastery where the French friar of the tale’s title is superior) and Matilda’s life is made miserable at the convent by a cruel abbess who turns out to be Conrad’s mistress. On his deathbed, Matilda’s father repents of his actions but Conrad ensures that Matilda remains penniless and immured in the cloister. She goes mad and escapes, harbouring “a disgust and loathing, bordering on fury, against every religious or monastic institution” (p.16). This is the anti-monastic rhetoric that critics expect from a Gothic tale, but the author contradicts it presently. Conrad and Albert meet and Conrad attacks Albert, who accidentally stabs his attacker in self-defence. Horrified, he flees to the monks, who attempt to reassure him of “the boundless mercy of his God” (p.17).

Meanwhile, the monastery’s rescue dog has found Matilda, deranged, clinging to a rock on the edge of a precipice. Matilda has not surprisingly developed a hatred of monks following her experience in the convent. However Matilda is clearly lunatic and on the brink of suicide, and her taunts as the friar tries to rescue her are presented as the taunts of a madwoman: “Here I am safe, deceitful monsters! Safe from the tyranny of your religious persecution; for if you approach, I plunge into this yawning gulph, and so escape your power. – Ha! ha! ha!” (p.18). The friar tries to persuade Albert to come and help her but, still wracked with guilt over the murder of Conrad, the youth shrinks back as he approaches the spot and sits “wrapped in an agony of irresolution” (p.19). Once again, the man of feeling is represented as incapable in even this situation, his counterpart’s peril. The monks, however, pursue Matilda and rescue her. But soon the abbess comes demanding her return and the friar is compelled to obey the requisition.

At this is the point the author gives the friar a long speech defending “the pious institutions of our holy church” (p.20) as Albert, in despair, curses their establishment as a

violation of “the first law of nature which commands an intercourse between the sexes” (the man of feeling typically privileges nature’s laws and the importance of sex therein: see Fribourg in Dacre’s *The Nun of St. Omer* and Harley in *Agnes de Courci*). The speech is, I suggest, very significant. In a manner recalling Burke’s *Reflections*, the friar defends institutions like his own as founded by “our pious ancestors”, for purposes “honourable to heaven and useful to mankind”. He then draws attention to the fact that the monastery is an asylum against “the oppression of human laws, which drove thee from thine home” – suggesting that the world in which the worldly young man and woman of sensibility live is a Gothic prison of oppression. This implies that the monastery, with its alternative laws of the spirit, is the least oppressive institution in the ‘modern’ world. Indeed, the monastery saved Matilda - “perishing with madness” – when society would lock her up. And the monastery is sheltering Albert himself from the justice to which he should be immediately delivered, as a murderer (and as it turns out Conrad did not die of his stab wound, so the monastery was right to do so).

Then, notably, the friar turns upon the selfishness and ingratitude of youth, that execrates whatever stands in the way of its own sexual gratification. In this, I would argue, the tale exemplifies the moral Christian message that the Gothic novels in this thesis are attempting to promote:

...yet thy presumption dares deny (monastic mercy’s) general use, from thine own sense of partial inconvenience, and execrates monastic institutions, because by a separation of the sexes, lewdness and sensuality are checked: but know, short sighted youth, that the world will not remain unpeopled, because a few of its members consecrate their lives to holy meditation; nor shall the human species become extinct, because Albert and Matilda cannot be united to propagate a race of infidels and murderers (p.20).

The monk puts the youth down, belittling his claim that monasticism is an unnatural violation of the feelings by imposing a more mature argument: his language and tone are those of a parent or teacher forced to curb the extravagant, impulsive, hormonally-driven demands of a teenage boy (“But know, short-sighted youth..”). His moral logic is unforgiving and notably strongly anti-sentimental, as he suggests in the language of science (“propagate”, “human species”) that the world cannot benefit from the offspring of such a ‘passion’. Clearly this friar is no superstitious old hermit. The author gives him an ability to reason, a knowledge of the law and of science in order to make his viewpoint and character more appealing and convincing to the ‘modern’ reader, to whom the moral issues are being directed. Certainly,

Albert quickly apologises and repents with all his heart his impulsive words. The friar assures him that the monastery, which his “hasty passion has profaned”, will nevertheless always be his refuge. And all turns out well: Conrad repents his evil-doings and joins the monastery as a brother. The Abbess kills herself (suggesting that she was always an imposter at the convent anyway and not a true Christian, for no true believer would dare to risk the fires of hell through suicide), and Matilda and Albert marry, with Matilda’s fortune secured in their hands.

The tale ends with the friar striking an ecumenical note on the nature of “True religion” – “howsoever it may vary in outward ceremonies, or articles of faith, (it) will always teach you to do good, to love and help each other”, to turn from sin, and to seek refuge in repentance and innocence when “the world and all its vanities have palled” (p.22). The friar has something of the Radcliffian “protestantized” Catholic about him at the end – the author makes him take a step back and say he does not endorse everything the Catholic Church dictates. Like many Gothic representations of Catholicism, therefore, this one carries an interesting ambiguity. But it is an ambiguity which shapes the role of the Gothic monk in these novels into a ‘universal’ pious hero: in these texts the monk is a defender of the entire Christian Church. The friar moves away, at the end of the tale, from the staunch defence of his own ‘cloister’, to make a strong statement about the shared fundamental values and beliefs of Christendom and the importance of their application in the world. In this role he is also a guide to frail, modern youth, teaching it not to stray into the perilous forests of the passions as its predecessors did, for that way madness lies.

The monk Theodore in an 1808 chapbook entitled *The Convent Spectre*, is another striking illustration of a monastic hero embodying Christian piety.¹ I must assume, despite scant evidence, that it is taken from a full-length novel, because on two occasions the monk Theodore is referred to as Eugenio, indicating a careless reworking of an original version.² The story opens in the “convent of St. Michaels” just as “The midnight bell had...toll’d a summons to the holy hermits..to attend in the oratory their first devotions for the coming day.” (p.3). Opening the narrative in an abbey or chapel before or after devotions of some

¹ *The Convent Spectre, or Unfortunate Daughter*, (London, 1808).

² Also when Montague Summers makes a reference to the work in *The Vampire, His Kith and Kin*, he lists it with another chapbook which definitely is a reworking of a novel, *The Demon of Venice* (a “redaction” of Dacre’s *Zofloya*).

kind, had become a Gothic convention after *The Monk*.¹ A stranger, Don Pedro, taking refuge in the church portico, stumbles into the church and sees a monk at prayer:

Upon looking into the church he descried at a distance the glimmering light of a lamp which faintly illumined a magnificent altar; and before it, bending on his knees, appeared to be a figure in the habit of a friar...he found a devotee on his knees, wrapt in inward contemplation; his figure was venerable, he was rather tall, and notwithstanding the plainness of his habit, had an air of great dignity; his mind was distinctly to be seen in his countenance, which was open, though grown pale and languid from penitence. He was so absorbed in his meditations, that for some time he neither saw nor heard Don Pedro...The Monk now raised himself from his devotions, when there appeared in him a natural dignity of mind, mixed with a modesty of deportment, that seemed well to correspond with the institutes of the life into which he had been elected, accompanied at the same time with a gentleness and elegance that highly adorned him (pp.3-4).

The monk's imposing figure, his "natural dignity", open countenance, "modesty of deportment" and "elegance" all mark him for a gentleman, a nobleman. Interestingly, these gentlemanly traits serve him well as a monk, seeming "well to correspond with the institutes of the life into which he had been elected". In this work we can identify the trend for the interplay and co-relation of gentlemanly or manly virtues and those of monasticism. Monkish and gentlemanly virtues are, as they were in the practice of chivalry, mutually inclusive. Theodore, once Count of Arco, the heir to a rich and illustrious Tyrolean house, now a humble monk, represents the refined man of sensibility, armed with religious devotion, who embodies true chivalric nobility: nobility of the soul.

Theodore lost his wife, Emilia, in childbirth and became very protective of his beautiful daughter, Emily. He secreted her in a convent to hide her from the pressing attentions of two suitors - the virtuous Mortimer, and a cruel nobleman - only to learn later that she had escaped convent, and Mortimer had been found murdered nearby. Theodore, having lost everything, and hearing no more from his daughter, turned to the monastic life: "Sorrow overcame me, and therefore have I devoted the remainder of my days to religion and repentance." By the time Don Pedro comes across Theodore at the altar the latter has been a monk for many years. His suffering, having left its strain on his face, has been transcended by a pious devotion and a confidence in the powers of religion to heal the heart and soul. The passionate urge to confess has drawn Don Pedro "to the bosom of the church"; he has fled to the convent of St. Michael's "as a terrified child runs for succour to its parents" - in other

¹ See *The Abbess* by William Ireland (London, 1801) *The Abbey of Weyhill* by Anon. (London, 1805), *The Abbess of Valtiera* by Agnes Lancaster (London, 1816), *The Black Convent* by Anon.(London, 1819), *The Confessional of Valombre* by Louisa Sidney Stanhope (London, 1812).

words, for protection and healing: Don Pedro knows the value of the Church's 'alternative' laws for assassins. Recalling the first scene of *The Italian*, in which the assassin is given sanctuary in the church, and is welcomed into the confessional, Don Pedro begs Theodore:

“I have need of your consolation and protection; pray throw me not from your holy sanctuary; though now I stand before you worse than a murderer!..” He then fell on the floor in agony, and it was some time before the monk could bring him to reason. – “Be comforted...and if your crimes can be forgiven, your sorrows may admit a cure in time, at least may be softened and rendered supportable. Fear not, my son; in this monastery you may rest confidently assured of finding charity and pity – I have also experienced much sorrow, and religion hath proved my consolation.” (p.4)

Here, again, the monastery is presented as a place of “charity and pity” to which those who would otherwise be judged severely can turn: and usually these assassins turn out not to have murdered at all, but merely to have injured someone - in other words, the monastery delivered them from a possibly unjust sentence in the real world. The author presents the monastery and its various enclaves of sanctuary - the confessional, the altar - as symbolic, of course, of faith itself: Theodore makes the connection in the next sentence, moving from speaking of the monastery specifically to religion in general (“Fear not, my son; in this monastery you may rest confidently assured of finding charity and pity – I have also experienced much sorrow, and religion hath proved my consolation”).

In his past life, Don Pedro's crime was to fall in love with the wife of his best friend (a Marquis) and inadvertently cause her death (she was stabbed by the Marquis in a furious fit of jealousy). Theodore inspires such confidence in Don Pedro that the latter takes the novitiate habit. However when he discovers that the Marchioness did not die of her stab wound and is now a widow, he relinquishes the cowl. Don Pedro's commitment to his vows is, therefore, somewhat weak – but in this tale this has positive implications. For Don Pedro is an example of a man of feeling, a man of the world, who explores monasticism and takes its virtues back into the world with him. Don Pedro was a melancholic, an intensely passionate young man like Harley in *Agnes de Courci*, who made love to the Marchioness illicitly and nearly destroyed them both. However like Theodore he repents and adopts the cowl and in his likeness to Theodore, becomes distanced from his status as threat, as peril.¹

¹ Theodore's early suffering is repaid by the godliness which is revealed in him in the end. Called to the deathbed of a nobleman who wishes to receive absolution before he dies, he discovers the abductor of his daughter and the murderer of Mortimer. Emily, Theodore learns, went mad and killed herself (and by a strange twist of fate was buried by Don Pedro whilst he was escaping his own situation!). Theodore, showing a 'divine'

Hoeverler remarks that the hero of the 'female gothic' novel is created by the heroine "as a shadow of a man who bears no resemblance at all to the father". This Gothic hero is usually wounded in some way during his adventure – a form of emasculation, to Hoeverler – and finally "put safely under the control of the professional girl-woman" (p.32). But in many of the Gothic narratives that I have come across, a monk has an important role in shaping the hero. The monk's narrative purpose is also to 'emasculate' the hero and make him fit to be the best protector and safe keeper for his beloved: but not by wounding him – indeed the hero in this scenario is rarely physically hurt; rather, by absolving him and teaching him the value of piety. The hero's dangerous masculinity is 'confessed' away. And often he is dressed in the monk's habit: a robe much like a woman's dress, which leaves the male form open and vulnerable, without the protection of a sword and unable to ride a horse. If, like Don Pedro, the hero wears the habit and cowl only temporarily, he is nevertheless changed permanently by it. The habit is symbolic of his spiritual transformation which is also subliminally gendered. Interestingly, when Don Pedro discovers the survival of the Marchioness, he goes to visit her in his habit. Ostensibly this is a practical precaution, taken to spare the widow from gossip, but it is also significant that it is as a monk that Don Pedro finally gains access to his beloved. Monasticism has subdued him and now he is genuinely worthy of the romantic hero's due: a beautiful, virtuous, titled wife. Instead of the usual physical trials of the young hero that prove him worthy of the heroine, monasticism is a stopping post on Don Pedro's journey: the author would seem to be suggesting that this makes Don Pedro a fitting hero.

Romantic heroes like Don Pedro who are half-lover, half-monk, appear time and again in Gothic novels written after 1800, which suggests that this heroic type started to emerge as the currency of the man of feeling faded towards the end of the century. One particularly popular and influential example of the type is Sintram in the novel by German writer Friedrich de la Motte Fouque entitled *Sintram and his Companions* (1814). Fouque's book was the product of the impulse of post-Revolutionary religious revival in Europe, described by Marilyn Butler as high church or Catholic in tendency.¹ Fouque was part of a literary movement which included the poet Novalis, and the political theorist Friedrich von Gentz. For them, as Sack argues, Roman Catholicism had an aesthetic fascination, and a

nobility, absolves the penitent. This wins him back his daughter, also in 'divine' (transcendent) form. Her ghost appears before them: "and stood for some time before her father, as if supplicating his forgiveness. "Heaven bless thee, my child!" said he, and fainting, fell into Don Pedro's arms. The spectre vanished, seemingly pleased with the benediction." (p. 36)

¹ Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background, 1760-1830* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p.174.

legitimacy imparted by its own resistance to change (p.217). They sought to romanticize Catholicism, much as Chateaubriand had done a few years earlier. In her introduction to the collection of four tales which included *Sintram*, the Victorian novelist Charlotte M. Yonge claims that the value of Fouque's writing lay in the "glamour of spiritual romance, bathing everything, from the old deities of the Valhalla down to the champions of German liberation, in an ideal glow of purity and nobleness, earnestly Christian throughout".¹ Spiritual romance is an important concept for this chapter, for it seems that the Gothic novels here created the type of chivalric, monkish hero that *Sintram* would make current. Monasticism, for *Sintram's* "sainted" mother, is an heroic choice. And the hero-knight Sintram himself, after his trials and tribulations, has a yearning for the cloister:

The holy peace which had its abode within these walls would have found its way to a heart less tried and less purified than that which beat in Sintram's bosom. Shedding some placid tears, the son knelt before his mother, kissed her flowing garments through the grating, and felt as if in paradise, where every wish and every care is hushed. "Beloved mother," said he, "let me become a holy man, as thou art a holy woman. Then I will betake myself to the cloister yonder; and perhaps I might one day be deemed worthy to be thy confessor, if illness or the weakness of old age should keep the good chaplain within the castle of Drontheim.

His mother, however, urges him away from "a sweet, quietly happy life" as a monk, in favour of the life of a "Christian knight" – which seems, after all, to be that of an action hero with the heart of a monk.

That *Sintram* was influenced by the Gothic is clear: its narrative style and use of supernatural elements recalls Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*. The tale also shares many conventions with the early Gothic: Sintram's family is overshadowed by the evil deeds of the patriarch, and his "sainted" mother takes the veil in order to atone for the crimes of her wicked, heathen husband.² The narrative can accurately be said to belong to the realm of "spiritual chivalry" however, for the plot involves Sintram's passage through many trials, ordeals and temptations to the attainment of the status of a perfect knight. Novels of spiritual chivalry would become very popular in the Victorian era. Yonge, a defender of moral education for young people, but especially for young women (she published a biography of

¹ Charlotte M. Yonge, introduction, "Sintram and His Companions" by Friedrich De la Motte Fouque, *Project Gutenberg*, University of Pennsylvania (September, 2001), <<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/lookup?num=2824>>. Further references will be to this edition.

² Raymond Chapman (p.178) sees *Sintram* as part of a continuing tradition that began with the historic-gothic novels of Thomas Leland (*Longsword*) and Clara Reeve (*The Recess*).

Hannah More) wrote a best-selling novel of spiritual chivalry, *The Heir of Redclyffe*¹. Fouque's spiritual romanticism and idealism, that "glow of purity and nobleness" that owed much to the Gothic idealization of the chivalric ideal, made him an important writer for the Oxford Movement in England. G. Battiscombe, in his biography of Yonge, notes that "to the Tractarians, *Sintram* was hardly less dear than *The Christian Year* itself".² It is interesting to note the romanticization of Catholicism finally being appropriated to promote the ideals of Catholicism in the period of Catholic revival.

Fouque's use of Gothic conventions and a medieval Catholic setting to illustrate orthodox Christian principles and to promote them as heroic virtues makes him a convincing successor to the Gothic novelists discussed in this thesis. The latter were, I have argued, engaged with the anti-secular, Christian-moral backlash that shaped religious and political discourse during the revolutionary years. Fouque's tale was shaped by the continental religious revivalism that followed the Revolution, and that also took its inspiration from the Romanism of the medieval era. *Sintram* is therefore, I suggest, the continuation and the apotheosis of the tradition of constructive engagement with Catholic forms that I have argued is evident in the Gothic during the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth centuries.

In early nineteenth-century Gothic novels I have found many examples of the hero with the heart of a monk. It seems a requisite of many novels that the young hero/lover fit the cowl before going on to win the traditional romantic prizes. In other words, a developed, even extreme sense of Christian virtues - humility, piety - becomes part of the Gothic hero's code. The Gothic novel, it seems, was an important though perhaps surprising place for the narrative of spiritual chivalry to take root.

A prime example of a hero of a Gothic narrative who is half-lover, half-monk is Antonio in *The Abbess of Valterra* (1816). Antonio was brought up in secrecy by the Abbess, that überheroine (amazon, virgin-mother, saint). Antonio is influenced by his mother's conventual virtues and strengths, which furnish him with "the best sensibilities of a compassionate heart" (Vol.II, p.43). Spending his boyhood amongst monks, Antonio becomes partial to the lifestyle of "chastity, poverty and obedience" and, once exposed to the world, sighs "for the seclusion of a monastery." (p.265). However, the monastic envelopment of this hero extends even further than that. At one stage, wishing to have her adopted son close to her every day, the Abbess disguises him as a novice nun. As a result "...he internally

¹ See Chapman, p.181.

² G. Battiscombe, *Charlotte Mary Yonge* (London: Constable, 1943), p.56. Battiscombe notes that *Sintram* captured the imagination of Anglican readers with High Church or Catholic leanings such as Yonge, who was a friend of Keble, and the young John Henry Newman (Battiscombe, p.56).

resolved, that while he was among women, he would make himself a little (a very little) like them. Gentleness and conformity now marked the conduct of the new boarder..” (p.197). Antonio is not only part monk, he is part nun!¹ This episode supports feminist theory’s claims that the male is feminized in eighteenth-century literature. It is also another example of how the Gothic novel propagandized the ‘new’ femininity, a code of female behaviour designed to act as a moral influence upon men (see chapter 4).² Antonio’s temporary ‘veiling’ only adds to his catalogue of superior, chivalric virtues: for example, Antonio’s most difficult test is resisting seduction by the beautiful wife of a good friend and benefactor. Like Joseph in the Old Testament - Steele’s example of “Heroic Chastity” in his didactic Christian writings - Antonio scorns the dangerous beauty and nearly loses his life to her in the process. But his chastity proves his superior worth as a hero, and reinforces our image of him as both knight and child of the cloister, or lay-monk.

The Confessional of Valombre by Louisa Sidney Stanhope (1812) provides us with an example of both the monk as hero and the hero as monk. Moreover its narrative turns on the central didactic theme of sensibility (or love) subordinated to Christian duty. Stanhope published fifteen novels between 1806 and 1830. Her titles betray the dogmatic patterns of her work: *The Confessional of Valombre*, *Di Montranzo: or, The Novice of Corpus Domini* (1810), *Montbrasil Abbey: or, Material Trials* (1806), *The Nun of Santa Maria di Tindaro* (1818). Stanhope also uses an abundance of Catholic imagery which she employs during emotional moments in the narrative: as for example when Theodore expresses his gratitude to his father, the monk Betsolin: “in the pious office of devotion, in the secret incense of the spirit, [I breathe] your eulogy to Heaven” (Vol. I, p. 62).

Theodore, the young hero, has been raised in a monastery by the virtuous Father Betsolin. Betsolin is, to all intents and purposes, Theodore’s father. In the tradition of the cloister theme, Betsolin was brought to the monastery by suffering and sorrow:

I took the cowl, because the world had nothing more to offer; because sorrow had dried every sluice of consolation, and nature and futurity were barren – I took the cowl because all hope of peace was exterminated; because death had severed the dear ties of connubial confidence and love...I took the cowl, because an insatiate world demanded exertions which my broken spirit could not make; because hope pictured no expectations for time to realize, and memory harrowed the protracted pilgrimage of existence...because the seraph-form of Religion, like the rays of the

¹ Tompkins mentions a very similar plot in a much earlier work entitled *Anecdotes of a Convent*. Published in 1771, the novel tells the ‘true’ story of a boy raised in a convent as a girl (*Gothic Romance*, p.92).

² See Hoeveler; also Claudia Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender and Sentimentality in the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

sun, penetrating the mists of darkness, shot through my benighted brain, and presented an anchor of reliance. I yielded to the sweet consoler – I trod the path marked out by Heaven – I became a humble candidate for favour; and beneath the roof of Valombre, regained that peace I thought for ever fled (Vol.I, pp.40-42).

Stanhope's religious moralism is deeply sentimental. She uses terms and phrases that would not be out of place in a devotional poem or a hymn ("pilgrimage of existence", "the sweet consoler"). Betsolin does not talk but preaches - the repetition of "I took the cowl" emulates the technique of momentum-building by re-emphasis in the tradition of the preaching.

Betsolin had been a slave. His wife and children were poisoned by an evil Eastern seductress who became obsessed with him - another use of the Joseph story. Betsolin's history is another story of male chastity preserved, and grief and anger turned into consolation and hope by the monastery. He learns that it is wrong to sacrifice "the calm dignity of moderation to inordinate passion...[to profane] the fair face of mercy by the frenzy of revenge" (Vol.I, p.51). Betsolin is more than just an adjunct to Theodore's story – like Theodore in *The Convent Spectre*, he is the one who forms him into a truly noble hero/lover: one who has all the chivalric virtues. It is important therefore that Betsolin is established as a man of mettle. The account of his odyssey in the East, and his impressive spiritual development, mark him for a character of 'heroic' status.

When the foundling Theodore comes to the monastery, Betsolin takes him under his wing. Betsolin's pious wisdom produces in Theodore a new type of Gothic 'avenger'. As the boy grows older, he longs to clear up the mystery of his birth and avenge any wrongdoing to his family – the habitual aspiration of the Gothic hero/ine. However Betsolin tells him sternly that "true heroism is meek, is lowly: not vaunting in idle words, in boasting phrases, in noisy asseverations. You would be a hero;" he tells Theodore, "first become a man: you would be an avenger; change it and become a Christian (Vol.I, p.51)." Betsolin teaches Theodore a new heroic code: true heroism is not defined by revenge but by the virtues and values of spiritual chivalry.

In Theodore, Stanhope creates a Wartonesque child of melancholy who is at the same time a symbol of the monastery. He has developed a "softened sadness of melancholy" from the constant perusal of "the mouldering monuments of departed worth"; "imbibed a deep, propelling tincture of romance" from inhabiting the cell of a venerable departed brother (he actually requested, at an early age, that he be granted the cell of Father Theophile, a monk who died rescuing a peasant child from a raging tempest). In the cell of this monkish 'hero', Theodore lies, "his eyes fixed on the hour-glass, and his thoughts fixed on the slight and

perishable tenure of existence”, like a character from the graveyard school of poetry, with “the hope of treading the inspired steps of his predecessor.” However Stanhope defines Theodore much more in Christian terms than any type of the graveyard poets. From the outset he is described as “the bequest of Heaven” his name (meaning ‘godly’) “given by Christian sponsors to a new and innocent candidate for Christian hope” (Vol.I, p.20). Stanhope is indicating that her gothic hero will be given a different type of challenge from that of the conventional romantic champion:

Nurtured beneath the monastic roof, elevated, even in infancy, to the divine worship of religion, his hopes and his wishes, his joys and his anticipations, reached not beyond the prescribed limits of the convent walls – reached not beyond the pious praise of the virtuous father Betsolin. By him, the warm, the glowing energies of sensibility were awakened; for he had caught the first smile of pleading helplessness; he had coloured the first tint of dawning gratitude.

But though examples of divine resignation, of patient endurance, of sublime sacrifices, of heroic virtue, were constantly set before his eyes; though the depravity, the ingratitude of man, was talked of without resentment; though the meek humility of the saint prescribed patience under injury, gentleness and fortitude, even under suffering, shame, and death, yet as times would the nature of Theodore, would his warm and ardent feelings, betray an impatience, which threatened even the overthrow of monkish controul and which resisted the erudite dogmas of monkish reasoning. Then alone must the heart be assailed to quench the glow of passion; and then alone the effervescing gust would pass away, hushed upon the parental bosom of father Betsolin – would lose its aim, nay, its very being – would become the meek and yielding convert to obedience and conviction (Vol.I, pp.21-22).

In this passage, Stanhope defies expectation. We think ‘nature’ is going to assert itself and prove that the thrall of the cloister with its insistence on “the meek humility of the saint” is impractical to a boy’s development. It would in Radcliffe’s Gothic world; but here Theodore’s passion, his ‘arrow’ of desire, is blunted by Betsolin. Once again we see the monk emasculating the hero in preparation for his role as perfect protector. Stanhope allows the monk to disarm this young hero of his ‘natural’ feistiness at the same time as she marks Theodore, by that feistiness, for the real world beyond the cloister. In this way, Theodore is clearly established as a hero whose natural passions will be important to his development, but will always be subordinated to monkish virtues before they (the passions) can take control. And indeed at his coming-of-age, Theodore does feel a tension between a desire for love and the cloister. He expresses a desire to join the Order, rejoicing as he always does at having been deposited in the confessional as a foundling (Vol.I, p. 204) and wishing to stay in the place where “the thrilling ecstasies of enthusiastic worship, [which] conquered every

sensation, and elevated him to the highest pinnacle of divine rapture” (Vol.I, p.34). However the odd surge of ‘Nature’ through his soul also suggests other possibilities: “the force of passion, the tyranny of love!” (Vol.I, p. 35). Notably, Stanhope describes love here in violent terms whereas the love of God is presented in the romantic/sexual terms more usually reserved for worldly love (“thrilling ecstasies”, “highest pinnacle of divine rapture”).

Though his adopted son is a willing celibate, Betsolin is a reasonable man who “would not force the vow of celibacy on the unguarded” (perhaps Stanhope is being careful not to invite comparison between Betsolin and the satirical anti-Catholic stereotypes of Smollett and Richardson here¹):

Though a monk, I would not bind the youthful heart in the chain of thralldom; for I am no candidate for Heaven, through the offering of an inexperienced sacrifice..” (Vol.I, p. 43).

“Inexperienced” is the noteworthy term: Betsolin desires Theodore to make an informed choice, based on knowledge of the alternatives to the cloister which is all the boy has known. Stanhope’s monk, in the tradition of the cloister theme, came to the monastery having learned about sorrow and suffering in the world. A humbled penitent who has conquered the passions and devoted himself to God in the pursuit of real nobility of spirit: such, implies Stanhope, is the moral ideal of monkhood. But by making this monk the teacher, the father-figure to the hero of the novel, she is also suggesting that such is the ideal of manhood. Stanhope’s monk is the designated example by which the young man of sensibility learns everything he needs to know.

The world soon calls Theodore, however. A spectre-monk (Montauban, disguised) starts appearing to the boy in the shadows of the cloister, and threatening the death of Betsolin, if Theodore does not secretly agree to do his bidding. The ghostly monk insists that Theodore leave the monastery and discover his true parentage. This mysterious and compromising occurrence, the first trial Theodore has ever had to face without Betsolin’s help, the first secret he has ever had to keep from his ‘father’, throws the boy into confusion and anguish:

...he pushed open the door of the little dormitory, and beheld the youth upon his knees before a crucifix, his eyes resting on the emblem of immaculate suffering, and his hands clasped in prayer.

¹ In *Roderick Random* (1748) and *Pamela* (1740-41).

“God of omnipotence!” he ejaculated, “guide me through the labyrinth I am doomed to tread.”

The monk was at his side; his staff fell to the ground, as his arms enfolded his pupil. “What labyrinth?” he eagerly demanded. “Say, dear, enigmatical boy, what new labyrinth entangles you feet?”

Theodore could no longer shrink from the scrutiny; he shuddered – he almost gasped for breath; then burying his face in the dark folds of the monk’s habit, faltered out, “*Life.*” (Vol.I, p.137)

As this passage denotes, throughout the novel life and love beyond the monastery walls has a dark significance. This moment when Theodore realizes what the real world represents, when he takes in the extent of the ‘labyrinth’ before him, has about it something of Adam’s expulsion from Eden. Stanhope portrays a boy for whom the cloister always represents an unspoilt paradise from which he is propelled, as if from an apprenticeship, but to which nothing else can ever really compare. Later his urge to seek out the young heroine Juliette (with whom he has fallen irrevocably in love) forces him to forsake the monastery and when he reflects upon his compulsion to sacrifice the cloister for the girl, it is with regret: “I was ungrateful...and forgot the real value of happiness, because it was in possession” (I, p.189). Stanhope seems to be saying that the cloister is symbolic of that quiet spiritual place from which the world calls us, but to which the world can never compare. In the Gothic the cloister, whether it functions as sanctuary or prison, is always defined by confinement. However Stanhope’s emphasis is on the liberty that the confinement of Valombre confers. She calls Valombre “the citadel of benevolence” (Vol.I, p.168) – “citadel” suggesting a fort for the defence of goodness in a dark world: very much the sort of image that was conferred upon the Church in England during the war with France. Stanhope, upholding this sentiment, emphasizes that being confined with “the benevolent and virtuous, with souls grateful for existing blessings, at peace with themselves, and zealous but for the benefit of their fellow-creatures” (Vol.I, p.189) is more precious than any amount of liberty to roam in the world where, as Montauban later says, “men prey upon each other; ‘tis the practice, ‘tis the pursuit of existence” (Vol.I, p.188). Even the usually bright prospect of the pursuit of love is shadowed by this narrative insistence on the preciousness of innocence, and the inevitability of sorrow in the world beyond the ‘citadel’s’ walls.

The monks decide to send Theodore on a mission to Bena Copia, bearing a ‘legation’ to the Mother Superior. At Bena Copia Theodore falls for Juliette, a lovely boarder who is attending at a veiling ceremony. On the way back to Valombre he is forced to seek shelter in a castle – the fearful castle of Vermandois, where Montauban and his banditti reside. There,

another spectre-monk appears to him and warns him of danger. However Theodore goes unharmed for the original ghost-monk from Valombre is revealed to be Montauban, and he has special plans for the boy. He informs Theodore that he has a father living. Theodore finds the lair of the banditti and their way of life utterly repellent. He sounds and behaves so much like a monk, that they start to address him as such:

“By St. Benedict! I thought the spectre-monk had spirited you away from Vermandois,” exclaimed the robber: “in truth, ‘tis a strange taste to go moping, and exploring, and telling beads, and muttering credos, as though your soul were black with sin. Why, boy, if Montauban’s were as white, I query whether his sleep would not be sounder.”

Theodore breathed a heavy sigh.

“Come, shake off that cast of care,” pursued Randolphe, laughing; “a penitentiary savours death, and death savours the devil.”

Theodore shuddered.

“A cowl and a shorn crown, and, by the mass! father Theodore stands before us,” continued the robber. “Come, be lenient, and name the purchase of absolution?”

“Repentance and atonement,” mournfully replied the youth. “Ah, mistaken Randolphe! The hour will come, when, owning the fallacy of sin, you will lament, vainly lament the undying record of transgression! Remember, to contrition heaven promises favour; but man, persevering in his crimes, bars the clause of mercy.”

“Preach on, and be installed an abbot,” replied Randolphe, in an ironical tone. “Who shall compose the fraternity? Say, to what office will your reverence nominate me?”

Theodore turned from him in disgust.

“Nay, you are a strange boy,” pursued the robber “to prefer the stale restrictions of the fathers, to a life which owns no law but inclination!” (Vol.I, p.260-262)

Stanhope is explicit in associating Theodore with Betsolin in the reader’s mind. His stern preaching (“The hour will come, when, owning the fallacy of sin, you will lament, vainly lament the undying record of transgression! Remember, to contrition heaven promises favour..”) demonstrates that Theodore’s character has the mark of the good monk stamped on it. The image of Theodore “moping, and exploring, and telling beads, and muttering credos”, is not an image we expect of a young hero on his first adventure. But the fact that Theodore prefers these “stale restrictions” of behaviour to “a life which owns no law but inclination” – in other words, a life ruled by the passions and the senses – is clearly supposed to be indicative of the workings of a superior nature, as those who are not like Theodore - Randolphe and his fellows and Montauban - are all portrayed as gothic ruffians of the blackest dye, murderers and thieves. It is obvious (and becomes more so) that Theodore has brought the cloister with him on his journey into the world and though venturing into ‘freedom’, psychically remains safely in its cells:

“My thoughts are the never-slumbering effusions of a grateful heart...enshrined amid the cloisters of Valombre...The powers of my mind, the strength of my feelings, the rectitude of my intentions, all, all do I owe to the interposing mercy of charity – to the ceaseless lessons of charity.”

“And nothing to Heaven?” sarcastically asked the bandit.

Theodore meekly crossed his hands upon his bosom, as piously he answered –
“Yes, all, every thing to Heaven; but next to Heaven, to Heaven’s servants.”
(Vol.I, p.169)

At this moment, Theodore is hagiographically described: his heart “enshrined” like a saintly relic; the saintly pose; the utter commitment to “Heaven” and utter reliance on “the ceaseless lessons of charity”. Theodore is encased in piety. The reader begins to think of him as indestructible. And of course, this is a moment when he needs to be, when he is in the depths of the Gothic castle surrounded by men in the thrall of the passions, bloodthirsty men with material goals. In Stanhope’s Gothic world, religious armour makes the hero unassailable in a society where scepticism, materialism and immorality hold sway.

Juliette, the object of Theodore’s new-born affections, is not unhappy in the “sacred retirement” of Bena Copia where she is being educated. She is “tinctured” by “the enthusiasm of her instructors” (Vol.II, p.68) and develops a piety that satisfies her zealously Catholic mother. Although she does not want to take the veil, Juliette would rather “quietly [slumber] in the lap of religion and of peace” (Vol.II, p.71) than marry against her will.¹ Stanhope again depicts the cloister as a place where one can remain in an innocent, child-like state; in Juliette’s case, the description - “slumbering in the lap of religion” – is nursery-like. Again, the way Stanhope defines the religious state, house or society as close and safe, a womb favourable to anything the world has to offer, is striking. The young heroine’s desire to remain within the convent walls (unlike Theodore’s) is not particularly spiritual: however Stanhope shapes her heroine to match the saintly Theodore - Juliette befriends a crazed nun, Sister Laurette, and begins a project of prayer for her salvation (Vol.II, p.229).

Montauban, with threats and lures (he tells Theodore that his real father is in danger and needs the boy’s help), soon gets Theodore away from the monastery altogether and in residence with the banditti. Theodore learns or *thinks* he learns that *Montauban* is his real father and, in an epiphanical moment, realizes his mission: “the salvation of a father’s soul...to snatch from the trammels of vice the author of his being, and dissipate the clouds of guilt with the awakening sunshine of repentance” (Vol.II, p.186). Theodore’s quest places

¹ The evil Duke de Vermandois has been selected by her ambitious father, for her future husband.

Stanhope's novel firmly in the realm of the narrative of spiritual chivalry. From this point, Theodore diverges from the role of the more recognizable Gothic hero for whom the 'salvation', or deliverance, of his beloved from physical threat is his *raison d'être*. In the thrall of religious conviction, Theodore is willing even to abandon Juliette to her fate:

“Yes, Juliette, the peerless Juliette! To save your soul, my father, to snatch it from perdition, to give it back to God, I will forego – my life, my being; renounce each darling hope and perish in the exercise of duty.” (Vol.II, p. 212)¹

Theodore is aided in his assignment by the spectre-monk. Again, Stanhope performs a notable transformation with a stock Gothic character. The spectre-monk or spectre-nun appears in countless Gothic narratives and his/her function is twofold: to obscure and then to enlighten. In the first instance, s/he veils and obscures the thought-processes of both character and reader by inviting a certain amount of metaphysical speculation: in other words, the spectre invites a superstitious response to its sudden presence in the narrative. Then in the pen-/ultimate scene s/he reappears as the key to the familial mystery that shrouds the plot: in other words s/he disperses obscurity by shedding light on all the mysteries of the situation. In *Valombre*, however, the ghostly monk functions as the spirit of the confessional, urging Montauban to confess his sins. The ghost turns out to be a penitent himself, a repentant bandit (Vol.IV, pp.1-7). The ghost is assumed to be that of the late Abbot Theodore, wanting revenge on his murderer, Montauban. Only Theodore, the child of the confessional, and the only witness to the hauntings with a clean conscience, gleans and accepts another possibility: ““Oh no; he comes not to arraign,” replied the shuddering Theodore; “he comes to admonish; he comes, on the mission of love, to point out, to enjoin the blessed clause of repentance”” (Vol.II, p.245). Stanhope gives her hero spiritual weaponry never before available to the Gothic hero. The haunted, dark space that is the Gothic castle holds no mortal fear for Stanhope's young hero, because she focuses his attention beyond its dark mazes, on heavenly 'blisses'. Theodore is so absorbed by his spiritual chivalric quest to 'convert' Montauban, that he looks beyond the mere metaphysics of the spectre, and spies the implications of its ministry (“Father, heed, attend, yield to his counsels, and he will redeem, he will save you...” , p. 245). Montauban is due to suffer the same fate as Lewis' Ambrosio, however; given over to despair, he will not be saved. He, therefore, continues to gibber at the ghost's appearance.

¹ Despite Theodore's split from Gothic convention, we can detect the habitual Gothic 'twinning' of the male and female hero in Juliette's concern for sister Laurette's redemption.

Soon a key meeting between Juliette and Theodore takes place, a meeting that demonstrates the chivalric side of Theodore's prevalently spiritual character. Juliette and her brother stumble into the castle on their way from Bena Copia to the family home where Juliette is to be prepared for her marriage to the evil Vermandois. Theodore helps them to safety and begs a small token of remembrance from Juliette – not the usual miniature framed with gemstones, but a small ebony cross, a “precious relic from the bosom of his saint”:

“Be that little cross my recompence,” he murmured; “be it the future emblem of my worship. In the den of vice it shall be enthroned in my bosom – it shall be cherished – it shall be sacred, as though within the pale of cloisteral sanctity. Lady,” and his eyes, in all the softness of entreaty, in all the expression of tender interest, rested on the glowing features of Juliette “in the monastery of Valombre I have learned to estimate the gift.” (Vol.III, p.108)

There is a careful ambiguity between the cross' spiritual value and its significance as a love-token - is it Juliette's memory or the holy spirit that will keep him safe in “the den of vice”? This seeming contradiction is merely evidence of Theodore's capacity for knightly or courtly love, in which love and spirituality complement each other, and there is a harmonization between the love of God and earthly passion. Theodore puts his pious duty before Juliette every time, but this does not compromise his love for her; indeed Stanhope suggests strongly that devotion learned in the cloister has provided Theodore with the resources to be the perfect romantic lover (“Lady...in the monastery of Valombre I have learned to estimate the gift”).

Theodore does not escape with Juliette whilst he has the chance. Shunning the easy option - freedom, the pursuit of happiness - he (albeit sadly) remains cloistered within the gothic castle to fulfil his quest:

...the hopes which once he formed...of leading his father to *the confessional of Valombre*, and claiming a blissful interest in his conversion, roused every dormant principle of exertion...” (Vol.III, pp.121-122).

We soon realize that Theodore is operating outside of the traditional gothic plot revolving around Juliette, her ‘twin’ Louisine,¹ Vermandois (a Montoni figure, like Montauban) and Juliette's brother Montelioné. It is Montelioné who takes on the role of the traditional Gothic hero at this point, escorting the girls, getting into fights, courting Louisine. This plot structure allows Theodore to pursue his spiritual course. Theodore moves in and out of the other plot

¹ Louisine is found by Theodore in a vault at Castle Vermandois. She turns out to be his sister.

at regular intervals but then, as a protagonist of the ‘spiritual chivalry’ narrative, he transcends the spaces that hold and regulate the standard Gothic male. Stanhope portrays spirituality as a focus that fixes the hero’s motivation beyond Gothic spaces; he can manage or control them (rather than *vice versa*), steering his own narrative course in, out and through the Gothic labyrinth. This makes him a more engaging character than Montelioné, Vivaldi, Lorenzo, Valancourt or any of the other Gothic heroes - one-dimensional figures who move through a narrative of capture, release and recapture, whose actions are always dictated by the physical situations in which they find themselves. Theodore is a more complicated character, a hero of more depth, because he is a character of greater independence: and his independence is dictated by his spiritual integrity.

As a writer, Stanhope is looking to forge stronger bonds between reader and Church, reader and individual moral and spiritual duty. Certainly by making her young hero the embodiment of religious devotion, she is attempting to make piety seem appealing to the young. She wishes the reader to desire to emulate the chivalric monkish qualities of her noble protagonists. And there is little doubt that Theodore *is* supposed to be read as noble. His piety is the conduit by which he displays all the characteristics associated with gentlemanly values. Stanhope makes Montauban, the aristocrat turned bad, recognize this when once again Theodore is compelled by his own pious convictions to leave Juliette to her fate and return to the castle:

“Did you,” he exclaimed, grasping the hand of Theodore, “generous, disinterested boy! Did you, for my comfort, forego the cause of love, and abandon to a rival’s power the hopes and happiness of Juliette?...Strange, wonderful being! How can I reward this heroic flight of virtue?”

“By renouncing the shackles of sin,” eagerly replied Theodore; “by courting peace in the exercise of duty. Father, give me but one blessed intimation of repentance, and my reward is complete” (Vol.IV, p.36).

Generosity and benevolence – the gentlemanly virtues - are however bettered, made “strange, wonderful”, by Theodore’s urgent desire to see a soul washed clean.

In turning away from a distressed maiden in order to rescue the seething patriarch, Theodore certainly is a “strange”, and quite possibly “wonderful” reversal or conversion of the conventional Gothic hero. For his reward, Theodore desires not the safety and heart of the girl, but the confession of a corrupt old man. It is notable that Theodore’s goal is not the altar, but the confessional, where to all intents and purposes he began his life. The final discussion between Juliette and Theodore, once Theodore has claimed his birthright,

crystallizes Stanhope's message. Juliette praises Theodore for his abundant spirituality, his natural 'honour' - what I have elsewhere termed 'true nobility' - which saw him through the perils of the dark castle: "...when enslaved by banditti, of what avail had been the boasted pride of *birth..?*" (Vol.IV, p. 260). Theodore, ever the humble child of the monastery, gives Betsolin all the credit, and 'Heaven' for placing him in Betsolin's care: to swerve from the "unwavering rule of right" of such a parent, he says, would have been "warring against virtue." But, insists Juliette, there is merit "in the exercise of duty": she points to the cross around his neck and asks whether he should not claim *some* merit for himself in foregoing "the incitements of the heart" as he did. If he had not, says Theodore, "I should have been unworthy the bliss I now enjoy; then I should have proved myself an apostate to the pious trust of religion, a rebel to the ordination of Nature" (pp.261-262). Religion, Stanhope implies, is ordained to us by 'Nature', trusted to us as a precious gift. Had Theodore not been a "true disciple" to "this first duty", his faith, he would be an unnatural, untrustworthy successor to his now-elevated position in society (as well as an unworthy father and husband). Stanhope makes it essential that the young 'knight' Theodore should win back through piety a misappropriated and bloodstained dukedom. Rightful nobility and piety are presented as inextricable.

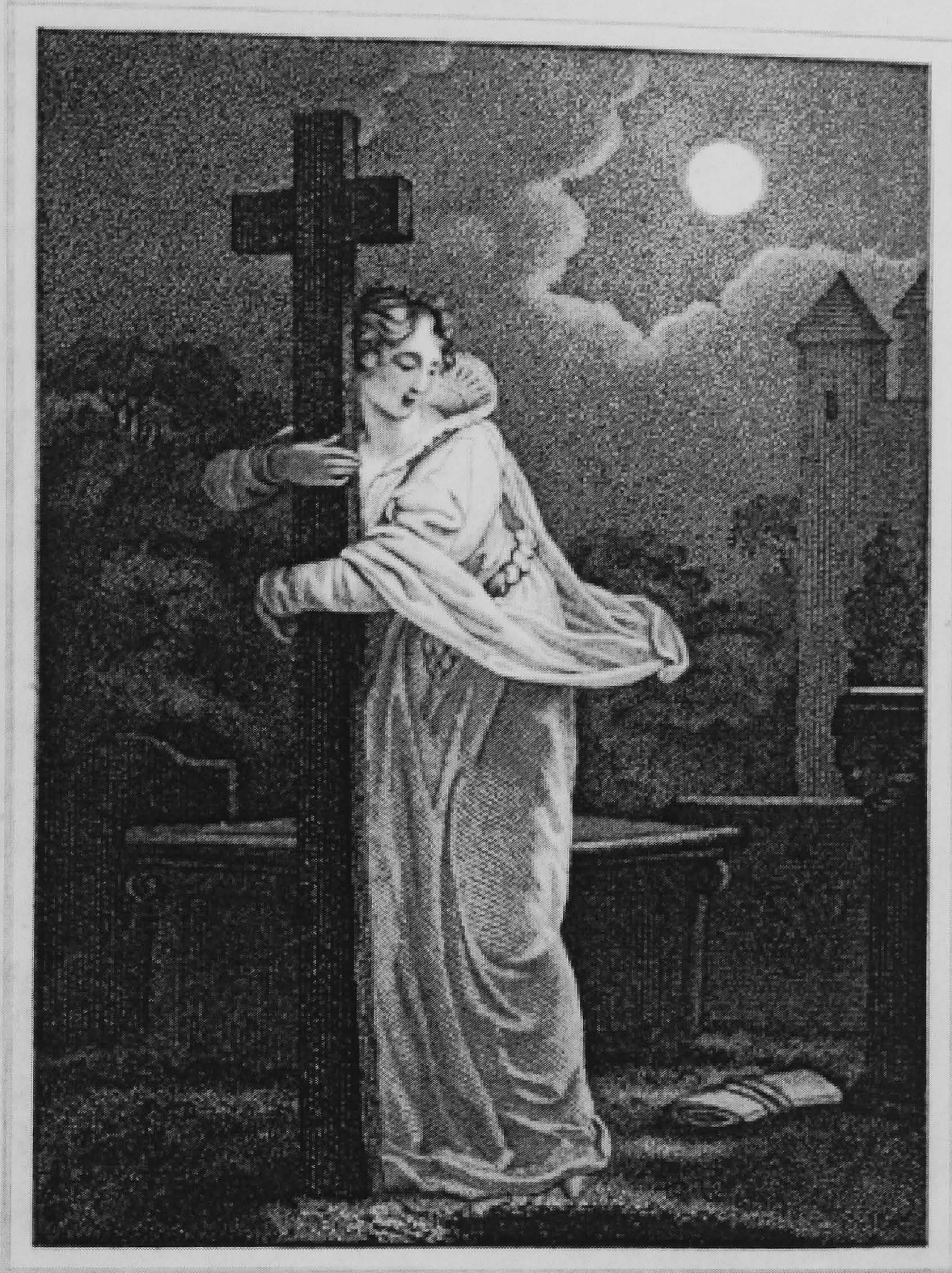
No longer contingent on physical daring, an urgent heart, a quivering sensibility, the nobility of the Gothic hero is shaped by a chivalric sense of monastic virtue and won by pious works. Theodore spends the novel not trying to rescue the heroine but endeavouring to persuade lesser mortals back to the confessional at Valombre to claim a share in the psychological freedom (freedom from guilt and sin) that his spiritual development has won him. The confessional represents both his monastic inheritance (his adopted father is a monk and was raised in the cloister) and his monastic definition: Theodore's adventure is a spiritual quest not a physical trial. This trial demands spiritual acts of heroism - self-sacrifice, sanctity - not the customary heroic acts of possession and retribution. Looking beyond the Gothic maze to heavenly 'blisses', Theodore has no fear of the dark or confining spaces that form his milieu; nor does he fear losing the heroine (he does not presume to possess her). He is an example of how the Gothic monk or monkish hero, like the Gothic nun, finds a self-possession and independence in spirituality which allows him to transcend restraining, punishing Gothic spaces. And as such he is a perfect example of a literary hero for the post-revolutionary era.

Toni Wein speaks of the conventional Gothic heroes as "Models of manners and integrity...they are honest, courageous, disinterestedly interested (another version of

impartiality), chivalrous to women, humble, and handsome....Above all, these are men in tights.”¹ The conventional Gothic hero is chivalrous only in as much as he rescues maidens in distress. He displays a disinterested benevolence rather than a Christian manner. He is elegant, he is refined – he does not mumble credos or crouch in the confessional. He employs “empirical observation” to aid his escapes from imprisonment “and to detect imposture and social injustice”, he certainly does not resort to prayer. Wein also notes “the new openness with which masculinity is defined” in the Gothic novel: “Gothic sentiment appears in the heroes’ and heroines’ responses to nature....Nature and scenes of domestic affection frequently make them swoon. Heroes, as much as heroines, are also prone to swoon when confronted with tyranny or supposedly supernatural visitations” (p.10). They do not overcome the midnight terrors of Gothic’s landscapes through acquiescence and spiritual transcendence. Clearly the monkish hero whose heroic traits draw on the ‘noble’ observance of Christian virtues is markedly different to canonical Gothic’s “men in tights”. Nevertheless, like them, Gothic’s men in habits were attractive enough to become models of heroism for their age, and for the one that followed.

¹ Toni Wein, *British Identities, Heroic Nationalisms, and the Gothic Novel, 1764-1824* (Gordonsville, VA, USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.9.

CONCLUSION



Engraved by Hollier from a Drawing by Craig.

THE SECRET TRIBUNAL,

from *The Secret Tribunal or, The Court of Wincelous, A Mysterious Tale* (London, 1803)

The focus of my argument in this study has been on demonstrating that the Gothic should no longer be categorized as a genre systematically promoting a tradition of English/Protestant anti-Catholicism. I began by disputing the prevailing critical opinion of an all-pervasive anti-Catholicism in eighteenth century England. My argument is that Burkean counterrevolutionary discourse in the 1790s essentially 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. However I have also shown that throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth there existed a sentimental relationship with Catholic culture which informed English art and music tastes, dress, architecture, poetics, literature, theology and politics. If we give this phenomenon any weight our idea of the eighteenth-century English/Protestant character - of "Englishness" - will surely need some modification.

From this premise it may be argued that there is also room for adjustment in our picture of Catholicism in eighteenth-century England. To date, Catholicism in the eighteenth century has been investigated by literary scholars as something of an anachronistic tradition, within certain old families, which had no bearing on the political or social climate or discourses of the time. We read much about the antiquarianism of aristocratic Catholics - which seems to signal them as being literally 'buried' in the past - but little about Catholics being relevant to contemporary public life. The political and public championing of Catholics as co-religionists in orthodoxy during the years when the Gothic novel flourished was a phenomenon therefore that I was most at pains to highlight in this study. Here is evidence that Catholicism as both a theological principle and as a denomination had some currency in England. Catholics were not it seems a crushed, forgotten or politically and socially irrelevant minority at the end of the eighteenth century. It was from an historical point of view that I was most interested in this ideological cohabitation of Anglicans and Catholics, which I have argued rehabilitated Catholicism in England. But this extraordinary development in Catholic-Protestant relations during the Revolutionary years also made sense of the position taken by the many Gothic writers I was discovering whose novels seemed to contradict much of what I had read about the intentions of the Gothic novel and the Gothicists towards Catholicism and the Church.

The rehabilitation of Catholicism in the last decade of the eighteenth century has been long underemphasized by Gothic scholars, and I have suggested that it has been overlooked because it raises too many questions about the popular reading of Gothic as a Protestant, anti-

Catholic, Whiggish – and more extremely as a subversive and irreligious - mode. The accepted critical reading of the Gothic is summed up rather well by Frederick Franks' enthusiastically dark interpretation of the picture reproduced above. The picture, taken from a bluebook engraving, shows a girl cleaving to a stone cross in a churchyard:

All of the distorted religious iconography of the Gothic romance converges in this remarkable engraving. The melodramatic flight of the maiden through an eternal night and from some pursuing unseen force resonates with paradises lost forever. Thecathedral, once a refuge or sanctuary, now glowers on the horizon like Milton's Pandemonium. The stark granite cross which the fleeing maiden embraces so desperately has ceased entirely to be a sacramental object and has become its very opposite, an emblem of ultimate terror. It is black, monstrous, and malignantly animated, its traditional salvational properties replaced by the graveyard gloom. Her hopeless flight has brought the maiden from one place of darkness and damnation to another equally dark and foreboding. Yet, she is determined to cling heroically to those decadent symbols of a religious and social order now morally transformed (*Gothic Gold*).

What Franks sees in this engraving is what the majority of commentators see in the Gothic. Gothic's "religious iconography" is merely "distorted" - its Christian symbolism the symbolism of "a religious and social order now morally transformed". The emblem of the cross in the Gothic is not only emptied of any directly religious significance, but ultimately filled with demonic meaning. It signifies the horror of corruption and tyranny, and looks, to Franks, "black, monstrous, and malignantly animated". However the existence of many Gothic novels which reflect conservative religious opinions of the day renders Franks' interpretation of "Gothic romance" imprecise: can we really call Gothic's religious iconography "distorted" after reading Sleath, Selden et al? And having pointed the inaccuracy of the assumption, we might ask other questions about our most canonical of Gothic authors as this thesis does, arguing that the monastic novels of Lewis and Radcliffe written just at the time when English culture was idealizing England's gothic monastic past may be closer to conservative opinion than has been previously supposed. On first seeing the engraving of the girl clinging to the cross in the Gothic graveyard reproduced above, which Franks interprets as representative of Gothic's demonization of Christianity, I thought it compatible with the pious theme of the Gothic novels of Sleath, Lancaster, Selden, Stanhope and Bennet. My interpretation of the central theme of these narratives is that devotion to "the cross" enables the hero or heroine to survive and/or transcend dark Gothic landscapes. As opposed to seeing the despair and hopeless desperation of the maiden in the picture therefore, I see a smile on her face as she embraces - rather than clings to - the cross. I see a softness in

the moonlight and in the breeze wafting her garments which Franks does not see. To me, the girl seems to be in a peaceful harbour, and indeed the episode in the narrative confirms my reading - Mira has just dug up the journal of a beloved nun with which she will be able to effect an important reconciliation, from beneath the cross.¹ It is interesting how my interpretation differs so much from Franks'. Moreover the emotions described by his reading have little bearing on what is actually happening in the narrative. This is a symptom, I suggest, of how coded Gothic scholarship has become: intention is presupposed, particularly when religion is the subject.

This thesis makes several more general points. My findings in these chapters reveal the importance of making assumptions about a genre's religious bias based on a wide reading as opposed to a handful of works. Through concentration on the slender corpus of novels scholars have decided constitutes the Gothic canon, Gothic's interest in and relationship with religion has become unhelpfully reduced, the tone of one or two scenes having been chosen to represent that of the entire aesthetic. Wider reading in this case is, I suggest, essential to a broader understanding, and is helpful in shedding further light on the information that we already have. For example I hope that my revisionist argument persuades that we should always explore the contradictions and inconsistencies which tend to exist in works and genres that seem to the post-modern critical eye to be treating religion casually. Because Christianity is no longer a dominant aspect of our culture today, scholars habitually underestimate its resonance in the eighteenth century. New historicist criticism in particular rarely seems to grasp the extent to which Christian tradition and belief pervaded everything in the eighteenth century, nor how Christianity touched and concerned the eighteenth-century man, woman and child on a daily basis. There is a tendency to overrepresent the status of secularity in eighteenth-century society and assume that a thinking individual, a person of letters, must have disencumbered him or herself of religious belief and its customs. In reality Christianity was still a way of life and thought: Ryan claims that religion was "the most conspicuous preoccupation of Britons at the time in their private and public lives."² It is essential then that scholarship does not make light of or abbreviate Christian themes, inferring tokenism or satire, when they pervade a literary work or genre of this period. This often happens simply because such themes are more assimilable as irony to the post-modern reader and critic. But I hope that in revealing Gothic's serious didactic (and pro-Catholic) religious side, this thesis

¹ *The Secret Tribunal or, The Court of Wincelous, A Mysterious Tale* (London, 1803), p 66-67. The secret tribunal in this narrative is not the Spanish Inquisition but the court of a secret society such as the Illuminati.

² Ryan, p.2.

contributes to a demonstration of why a more extensive treatment of religious topics in eighteenth-century texts is key to an enhanced and nuanced understanding of those texts, their genres and the cultural and historical moments they describe.

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