

# A Developmental Approach To Religious Prejudices in *The Monk*

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From the time of its origin in Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1765), gothic fiction has presented medievalist fantasies in terms of stock Protestant prejudices. Matthew G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) is among the most conspicuous of these fictionalized diatribes, for its very title indicates its target: Catholic monasticism, associated by Lewis with spiritual pride, debauchery, incest, murder, and Satanism. Both because of the book's recent bicentennial and the rising number of scholarly studies devoted to the gothic, that volume is being read and taught. How, though, can a modern reader respond to such religious prejudices as it exemplifies? Efforts to answer this question fall generally into one of two categories: (1) attempts to locate them with the historical context of the novels; (2) various psychological approaches.

## The Historical Context

Victor Sage argues that such gothic works as *The Monk* are part of a Protestant tradition "strongly related to the growth of the campaign for Catholic Emancipation from the 1770s onward until the first stage ends temporarily with the Emancipation Act of 1829..." (Sage 28-29). He does not, however, give any detailed correlation between the events of that campaign and the novels. A major obstacle to such a correlation is the complex and ambiguous history of religious persecution, susceptible to highly disparate interpretations. On the one extreme, in a 1994 study of Jacobites, Murray Pittock declares that for much of the eighteenth century, British Catholics such as Alexander Pope had "fewer rights than a South African black at the height of apartheid" (Pittock 108). On the other extreme, in a 1995 defense of the Irish Protestants ("a minority people who have found themselves under perennial attack"), Desmond Bowen emphasizes the tolerant, "latitudinarian spirit" of the Protestant ascendancy (Bowen backcover and 131). Nonetheless, Bowen's quotations of Protestant "mildness" all include some such diatribe as Rev. John Richardson's against the "horrors and corruptions of the church of Rome" (Bowen 130).

The crux is that anti-Catholic laws were severe, preventing recusants' suffrage, enrollment in any learned profession, inheritance of property, or marriage in their church, thus declaring their children illegitimate. As to actual enforcement, however, this varied from period to period and place to place, indeed, from individual to individual. In London, the last priest to be imprisoned for life for being a priest was in 1767, but arrests continued until 1771, with the accused being acquitted – as many actual priests had been for over a century (Newton 225). After one anti-Catholic riot, Joseph Berington complained, "Shall I sit down satisfied, because the good humour of a magistrate chooses to indulge me; whilst there are laws of which any miscreant has daily power to enforce the execution?" (Berington viii). In 1778, Catholics received the right to own property, but in 1780 Lord George Gordon (by some accounts delusional at the time), gathered fifty-thousand Protestants to an anti-Papist rally in St. George's Fields, Southwark (Newton 237). They became the vanguard of mobs throughout the country. In London, the rioting lasted six days, burning Catholic property and murdering its owners. What is notable is the capriciousness of the oppression. As Berington complained, enforcement of laws was unpredictable – as was also illegal violence. Two years lapsed between the 1778 Relief Act and the riots protesting it. Somewhat comparably, two years passed between the Catholic Relief Act of 1793 and the intensification of Catholic/Protestant tension into the battle of the Diamond, which led to the founding that year of the (anti-Catholic) Orange Society. By 1797, it had spread across Ireland and numbered about two-hundred thousand members. Certainly, many sources – economic, political, and theological – troubled relations between the denominations, but the situation cannot be described in terms of consistently followed policies. Aptly, Daniel Defoe said of one outbreak, mobs would "fight to the death against Popery without knowing whether Popery was a man or a horse" (Quoted in Newton 237). Normally mild-mannered Protestants became irrationally belligerent. John Wesley, for instance, "not only took an active part in the Protestant Association, which was behind the (Gordon) riots, but at his suggestion that body published a handbill after the rioting which declared that the Catholics themselves had committed all the outrages in order to be able to charge innocent persons with the crimes" (Newton 159).

What had the Catholics done to deserve such treatment? Protestants assumed Catholic believed: (1) "that the Pope held power to release subjects from their allegiance" to their kings; (2) that he could require Catholics to take up arms against their government; (3) that he was to them in some general sense infallible; (4) that he could "pardon perjury, rebellion or high treason"; (5) and that Catholics need not keep faith with "heretics." In 1788, the principal Catholic universities (the Sorbonne, Louvaine, Douay, Alcalá, and

Salamanca) as well as a committee of leading British Catholics denied that Catholicism included any such beliefs (Connell 60; Bowen 144).

Perhaps anti-Popery took on its strangest forms when it was even turned against Protestants and atheists. What, for instance, was the cause of the de-Christianizing in France? In 1793, festivals were celebrated with “goddesses” on altars; campaigns of desecration were headed by former monks; many ecclesiastical buildings were destroyed leaving “naked dancers and drunken children in the ruined churches and among the gravestones ...”; and all but the most compromising priests were persecuted, exiled, or killed (McManners 88, 92, 113). Logic would seem to preclude Catholicism as a culprit. Many, Protestants, however, blamed the Catholics. Not only British Protestants felt this way but the former dean of the Protestant theological school of Montaubon wrote to Robespierre, “We have made Reason a sort of Heavenly Queen and we imitate the fury of fanaticism!” (Bouloiseau 217). The reference to “Heavenly Queen” meant that the revolutionaries were still lost in Catholic Mariolatry, which they had transformed into a Goddess of Reason. “Popery was no longer (to Britain) the enemy as such, but it was frequently cited as the influence that had created the despotic state of affairs from which the Revolution had emerged. Protestant England had made 1688 possible; Catholic France had made 1789 and 1792 inevitable” (Deane 22; Richards 23-24). Burke writes, “These Atheistical fathers have a bigotry of their own; and they have learnt to talk against monks with the spirit of a monk” (Burke 125). According to Burke, the anti-Papist, pro-Jacobin, Dissenter, Rev. Price was like a Catholic – an “arch-pontiff ... with all the plenitude, and with more than the boldness of the papal deposing power in its meridian fervour of the twelfth century ...” (25).

According to Protestant polemics, Catholicism had added superstitions to Christianity in order to bolster clerical authority. Thus, anything but the most narrowly defined canon of beliefs smacked of Popery. Cartoons, for instance, showed Methodist ministers as secret Jesuits (Whitlark, *Illuminated Fantasy* 82). Some exposers of “conspiracy” made similar charges seriously, e.g., Charles Louis Cadet-Gassicour’s *Le tombeau de Jacques Molay ou le secret des conspirateurs, a ceux qui veulent tout savoir...* (1796). It deems Price a Jesuit dupe or agent (Roberts 180). Despite Burke’s *Reflections*’ emphasizing his own “zeal” as a Protestant (104), both Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft, in their replies to it, imply that his conservatism is ultimately Catholic. The anti-Dissenter, Birmingham riot of 1789 came partly because the Dissenter Priestley had written about laying gunpowder under superstition – superstition being one of those catchwords for crypto-Catholicism. His language, however, reminded Anglicans of the Roman Catholic terrorist Guy Fawkes, so the rioters assumed that the Dissenters would

likewise try to bomb Parliament (Brown 78-80). Conflation of the enemies of Anglicanism with one another continued for decades as in Edward Coxe's verses (1805):

To make the wrong appear the right,  
And keep our rulers in;  
In Walpole's time, 'twas Jacobite,  
In Pitt's tis Jacobin! (Quoted in Pittock ix)

Logically, one might presume that, in *The Monk*, the mob which attacks the abbess, is either a satire of an earlier age's Spanish Catholics (as it purports to be) or of Jacobins contemporary with Lewis. Since Catholics were the alleged precursors of the Jacobins, both may be the subject, as I have argued elsewhere, but this merely shows why the Inquisition was again topical (Whitlark "Heresy Hunting...". Lewis sets *The Monk* during that period as a standard object of Protestant polemics and Gothic horror, e.g., William Godwin's *St. Leon*. Despite almost obsessive use of Catholicism for local color, *The Monk*, however, shows only a superficial understanding of Catholic doctrines and practices, as with Lewis's conflating friars and monks – a common imprecision in the literature of the time. Indeed, the book is a microcosm of British prejudices and misinformation, not a detailed *roman a clef* of Lewis's age.

If one does not look closely, its bigotry seems to treat Catholicism merely as the Other. It is mysterious, conspiratorial, diabolical. Today, literary critics find this vaguest level of prejudice the easiest to envision; thus, the word "Other" has become jargon. It is sometimes coupled with attempts to find rational explanations for anti-Catholicism e.g., the industrialization of the Armagh weavers, which probably intensified competition between the Anglo-Irish and the indigenous population. The No-Popery pamphlets of the times, however, do not read like the tracts of Marxists but of mental patients. They have many specific names for Catholicism, but "Other" is not one of them. Study of the late eighteenth century shows the climate of intolerance from which they arose, but, just as actual weather is ever changing and unpredictable, persecution had an amorphousness that keeps its record outside of the novels from being a very helpful guide to them, especially since they are usually set in pre-eighteenth-century periods.

#### **From Previous Psychological Interpretations to a Developmental Approach**

If, for the most part, the history of eighteenth-century persecution cannot be correlated in much, clear detail to prejudices in novels contemporary to it, has psychology been more useful? Because of the present vogue of neo-Freudian criticism, anti-Catholic stereotypes in the gothic works have largely been seen in terms of repressed attitudes, especially toward parental imagoes. Anne Williams's *Art of Darkness*, for instance, argues that, in *The Monk*, the Catholic Church is "a kind of institutional Terrible Mother"

(Williams 117). She continues with an equation of the female with “horror” and an implied comparison of dungeon murders with the womb. Almost the converse, Maggie Kilgour’s *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, also published in 1995, reads Catholicism and its chief embodiment, Ambrosio, in terms of the theme of the *protective* mother. “Lewis... suggests that Ambrosio’s perverted development... is due to his lack of a mother” (146). As surrogate mother, that Church, according to Kilgour, is overly protective and untrustworthy, but lacks the extreme terror and horror that Williams ascribes to it. Further afield, in her *Sexual Personae*, Camille Paglia contends: “Protestant rationalism is defeated by Gothic’s return to the ritualism and mysticism of medieval Catholicism, with its residual paganism” (265). While Kilgour’s and Williams’s psychoanalysis understand Lewis as strongly or mildly attacking Catholicism (based on his presumed attitudes toward his own mother), Paglia’s sees the writers of gothic works as closet Catholics, who really want to be pagans, since even more deeply they would break free from civilized rationalism and its sexual restraints. Still other psychoanalysis of *The Monk* interpret its Catholic monasticism by focusing on Lewis’s presumed homosexuality. As with attempts to correlate the novels with a chronology of persecution, previous psychological readings have had contradictory emphases and lacked very detailed discussion of specific prejudices.

Consequently, I am advocating not just another competing version of Freudian psychoanalysis but an application of principles sufficiently uncontroversial so that they appear in disparate psychological schools. Throughout many of these, a basic understanding is that the process of human maturation is difficult; therefore earlier stages of emotional and cognitive development persist and continue to cause difficulties after being partly outgrown. According to Freud, there is perennial danger of regression to the “oral,” “anal,” or “Oedipal.” Similarly, Lacan attributes many psychological problems to the “Imaginary.” For Jung, “archetypes” link individuals to earlier stages in the development of the species – an idea anticipated by Freud’s “primitive vestiges.” Scholarship on Gothic literature already routinely connects threatening imagery of the past (e.g., haunted, moldering castles and ancient beings lurking in the darkness) with return of repressed stages of personal or human development. Thus, what is least controversial is that the gothic works evoke immaturity.

The point of this essay is that in imagining a religion different from their own, people habitually identify the alien faith with low stages of development. Thus, *The Monk*, tends to classify “superstition” (i.e., Medieval beliefs associated by Protestants with Roman Catholicism) as “puerile” (349) or “childish” (349-350). Ambrosio’s villainy is repeatedly blamed on his Roman Catholic education (e.g. 237-239). One of the enduring

charms of the book is that Lewis provides valid psychological insights into spiritual immaturity. He makes these more palatable by projecting them into a Catholic past, so that his readers might learn from them while still feeling a pleasant sense of superiority. Today, however, the book should be taught as a fantasy diagnosing the foibles of Lewis and other Anglicans indirectly, not a direct and accurate portrait of Spanish Roman Catholicism. Whatever Lewis's intentions or the assumptions of his first readers, an honest use of the book must unravel his psychological insights from denominational prejudices. Religious bias finds its insidious way even into academic discourse (as with the already-mentioned Pittock and Bowen).

In arriving at a developmental, psychological approach, one must be careful to avoid such biases, from which psychologists have not been immune. Most notorious was G. Stanley Hall, who theorized that each individual recapitulates the development of the human race from fetishism to Christian love. This theory is so obviously ethnocentric that it has slipped from fashion. However, the tendency to label others' religions as juvenile is seductive. Even into the nineteen-nineties, F.K. Oser has identified the third of his five stages of individual religious development with Deism. To Freud's atheism, all religions constituted states of immaturity.

The idea that a religion might represent a frozen stage of development should be suspect. As has been shown by Jean Piaget and those who have corroborated his work, each individual matures through a series of cognitive states. Their pace and manifestation may be slightly more variable than Piaget first assumed, but their existence seems well testified, for instance, in David Elkind's study of religious development in Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic children. Corroborative application of Piaget's work to religion began in the 1960s with Ronald Goldman. More recent exploration of religious/cognitive development has come from the psycholinguistics of A.G. McGrady, R.J.L. Murphy, and N. Slee, but with important names in between, notably James Fowler, M.J. Meadow, and R.D. Kahoe.

Consequently, many (perhaps all) religions are likely to contain the highest (i.e., adult) stage of development. Take, for instance, children's rise from concrete to abstract thinking. In religious terms, this is from idolatry (the Divine considered concrete) to non-idolatrous worship. In Catholicism, idolatry is avoided by distinguishing between *áulia* (reverence given to an image) and *íaríá* (worship given to God, who transcends representation). In Protestantism, idolatry is avoided by reducing the number of icons and the ceremonies of reverence to them. Moslems virtually eliminate representational religious art. Thus, Protestantism may seem idolatrous to Islam, and Catholicism to Protestantism, yet adult worship in each faith has outgrown a childish limitation to concrete

thinking. Similarly, to Moslem and Christian missionaries, Hindu veneration of images has appeared idolatrous, even though Vedanta goes further from the concrete and material than either of those faiths. Unable or unwilling to respect spiritual variety, eighteenth-century Anglicanism tended to classify the "Romish superstition" as puerile. Nonetheless, in studies by Greer (1981) and Hoge and Petrillo (1978), Roman Catholics actually scored higher than Protestants of J.H. Peatling's measure of religious maturity. This, of course, does not mean that in some absolute sense Catholics are more mature. Personality tests also may exhibit cultural bias. The point is that people generally use their own standards of maturity for others who aspire to different, equally viable measures of adulthood. Naturally, as Piaget himself noted, not every individual matures to the highest level offered by his or her tradition. (Indeed, one might suspect that those who are having the greatest difficulty developing are the most likely to project their own difficulties onto members of other traditions, i.e., voice prejudices against them).

Piaget's paradigm of development is from concrete to abstract, undifferentiated to differentiated, literalism to linguistic sophistication, and magic to realism. Based primarily on the first three of these, M.J. Meadow and R.D. Kahoe define mature religious attitudes as (1) "avoidance of idolatries," (2) "mature conscience and values," and (3) "acceptance of human foibles." As already mentioned, "idolatry" is the Christian term for the concretization of the spiritual. The maturing of conscience and values requires "differentiation" in Piaget's terminology, while acceptance of human foibles arises from larger experience and a more sophisticated understanding of language (in contrast to a child's interpreting rules very literally). These three, mature attitudes number among those British Protestants have consistently claimed Roman Catholics lack. As to magical thinking, it has been an additional charge against Catholics, particularly in connection with transubstantiation and belief in many more miracles than are mentioned in the Bible. Legends of Roman Catholic priests indulging in sorcery have also adorned some Protestant polemics.

"Idolatry" corresponds to James Fowler's "Mythic-Literal Stage," which he associates with Piaget's "Concrete Operational" phase and locates in the elementary-school years. A major Protestant charge has been that Catholic reverence for saints (and charismatic priests popularly classed with the former) leads to a sinful perpetuation of this immaturity. Ambrosio is called the "idol" of Madrid. He has become thus both to his congregation and, in his arrogance, to himself as well. He also practices other idolatries. For instance, his reverence for the Virgin Mary (a devotion particularly denounced by Protestants) is so extreme that, in a dream, he makes love to a painting of her: "He pressed his lips to hers, and found them warm; The animated form started from the Canvas,

embraced him affectionately, and his senses were unable to support delight so exquisite" (67). The picture turns out to be that of a demon. (Christians have regularly charged that idolatry is really devil worship). She seduces him through flattery "approaching idolatry" (67) as when she calls him a "divinity" and the "idol of my heart"(83).

Although Mariolatry is the most prominent "idolatry" charged against Catholics, Protestants find all non-Biblical saints suspicious. Stressing their number comically, Lewis cites Saints Jago, Barbara, Francis, Agatha, Clare, Anthony, Denis, Benedict, Rasolio, Ursula, Lucia, Catherine, and Genevieve, some of them repeatedly. Several characters, including the demon, call Ambrosio one. Among the devices that make saints particularly noticeable is that much of the action centers around their images. The picture of the Madonna dominates scenes of devotion until Ambrosio finally tears it to shreds in disillusionment and apostasy. This embodies what British Protestants consider the basic Catholic pattern: being kept at a childish level until, when Catholics outgrow it, they find nothing in their religion to accommodate them and thus may lose Christianity altogether. (This is part of the Jacobite-to-Jacobin stereotype already noted.)

Consequently, saints' images are shown either being virtually worshipped or conspicuously profaned. In the opening scene, an impious throner sits on St. Francis and St. Mark, while "St. Agatha found herself under the necessity of carrying double" (36). Fornicating lovers use "a colossal statue of St. Francis" as the depository for their correspondence (54). Lorenzo conceals himself behind it to eavesdrop (55).

Miscellaneous, Theodore tells nuns that he lost an eye by opening it during the dressing of a statue of the Virgin in her regalia: "The glory which surrounded the Virgin was too great to be supported. I hastily shut my sacrilegious eye, and never have been able to uncloise it since" (282). In their childish credulity, they believe this tale, which, by Protestant standards, is inherently idolatrous. Such a blinding glory is usually ascribed alone to the sight of God. Certainly, an appearance of naivete pervades the later scene where Antonia kneels before "a statue of St. Rosalia, her patroness" and chants a "Midnight Hymn," seemingly to the image as the representative of heaven.

Reliques also receive their share of satire. The hypocrite Ambrosio is so much the "idol" of Madrid that even his broken rosary is venerated: "Whoever became possessor of a bead, preserved it as a sacred relique; and had it been the chaplet of thrice-blessed St. Francis himself, it could not have been disputed with greater vivacity" (46). When Ambrosio visits the convent of St. Clare: "He was paraded through the garden, shewn all the reliques of saints and martyrs, and treated with as much respect and distinction as the Pope himself" (322). The credulous nuns shower the dissembler Theodore with what they hold most precious: "some brought reliques of saints, waxen images, and consecrated

crosses; and others presented him with pieces of those works in which the religious excel... All these he was advised to sell, in order to put himself into better case; and he was assured that it would be easy to dispose of them, since the Spaniards hold the performance of nuns in high estimation" (287).

The climactic exposure of idolatry occurs during the burning of the Abbey. The nuns cower by a statue of St. Clare, as if it could protect them. They inform Lorenzo that it still holds the skeletal hand of a thief, who – miracle of miracles – could not pry himself loose from where he profaned the stone. Lorenzo, however, discovers that the abbess invented this "miracle" and had a skeletal hand placed there to conceal the entrance to a hidden room. Therein, Agnes languishes in cruel imprisonment. The contrast is between the idolatry of the nuns and the duplicity of the abbess, who, having outgrown their childishness, went not to a higher spiritual stage but to hypocrisy (as Protestants presumed was typical of Catholic prelates).

Idolatry correlates with Lacan's "Imaginary," i.e., young children's thinking in emotionally charged images before they can speak. To this Lacan contrasts the "Symbolic," i.e., language, which permits a more nuanced and controlled approach to reality. Protestantism charged Catholicism with over-emphasizing the visual: saints' processions, elaborate rituals, maudlin pictures, crucifixes – all supposedly tinged with idolatry. Before the Protestant Reformation, the Church worried that if the untrained read the Bible, it might lead them into sin; thus, there were various restrictions on Bible reading. This inspired the Protestant accusation that Catholicism was trying to keep its followers tractable children, entertained with pretty shows instead of educated with language. Antonia's mother writes for her an expurgated Bible – an extreme version of the allegedly Catholic attitude. Naturally, villainous and tyrannical Ambrosio approves. So extreme was Protestant aversion to the very idea of an expurgated Bible that Lewis was blamed for even mentioning such a notion.

As to "conscience and values," Ambrosio's morals are in a more deplorable state than his theology. At the "Mythic-Literal Stage" (when God seems idolatrously concrete), a child is at least expected to understand fairness and reciprocity. Later stages further differentiate conscience, adding awareness of interpersonal expectations, societal rules, roles, laws, procedural justice, and finally universal care. Although, on a very external level, Ambrosio maintains a holy role, his own emotions rise no higher than thoughts of "punishment-reward," Fowler's "Intuitive-Projective" (aligned to Piaget's "Pre-operational" level). Often, Ambrosio behaves at Fowler's still lower "Primal" stage: trying to intuit standards when cognition is at Piaget's "Sensory-motor" level. Appropriate

to his sensuousness, the book ends with Ambrosio in an infantile immobility, undergoing extreme sensory torture – the result of his spiritual movement backwards.

The start of this decline was “vanity,” a vice Lewis describes as “childish” (175). Victor Sage writes, “There are ... (according to stereotype, for Catholics) no conscious, no *internal* checks on spiritual pride. The self of a Catholic, to the Protestant imagination, is not approachable; it does not exist in the body, but elsewhere (i.e., in the ecclesiastical institution)” (Sage 38). British Protestants charged that reliance on “priestcraft” kept the individual worshippers from internalizing values and developing a mature conscience. Instead they looked to confession and other rituals of the church to bestow a religious life on them from the outside. Confession is a *leitmotif* throughout the book. “(Ambrosio) was named confessor to all the chief families in Madrid; and no one was counted fashionable who was in joined penance by any other than (he)” (240). Nonetheless, Leonella remarks, “Were he my confessor, I should never have the courage to avow one half of my peccadilloes, and then I should be in a rare condition!” (48). This foreshadows Agnes’s making a “feigned (i.e., incomplete) confession” to him (71). Whether Catholics entrust all to the magic of the priest or damn themselves through the equally childish trick during that sacred office, they supposedly fell to develop maturely differentiated consciences. Similarly, Papal sale of dispensations drew Protestant ire. Lewis alludes to that issue when Don Cristoval boasts “my uncle’s credit at the court of Rome would ... obtain for my mistress a dispensation from her vows” (188). Protestants particularly distrusted the power that confession and dispensation gave clerics. Exemplary of this, Ambrosio profanes his role as confessor by making it part of his planned seduction of Antonia. He also violates if not its letter, at least its spirit, when, in the midst of confessions, he betrays the confidence he finds in Agnes’s letter. Whether or not these ecclesiastics are modeled on Lewis’s own parental imagoes, they embody perennial fear of being kept at a childish level.

As to learning “acceptance of human foibles,” the Protestant allegation was that Catholic standards were so impossibly high that they prevented the development of sound, realistic morals. This is quite explicitly the case for Ambrosio. The monks who raised him are said to have “painted to him the torments of the Damned in colours the most dark, terrible, and fantastic, and threatened him at the slightest fault with eternal perdition” (237). Protestants further admonished that Catholic ethics were perverse in creating sins unknown to the Bible such as abandoning celibacy or eating meat on Friday. As imposed continence, Ambrosio’s monastic vows make him more vulnerable to the devil’s wiles. Lewis’s anti-Catholic satire also includes the stock, comic, old Catholic woman Jacintha, who “tell(s) her beads four times a day, and observ(es) every fast prescribed by the

Calendar" (321). There is, of course, much criticism of Catholic asceticism, e.g., "She painted in their true colours the numerous inconveniences attached to a convent, the continued restraint, the low jealousies, the petty intrigues, the servile court and gross flattery expected by the superior" (379).

Denied knowledge even by the expurgation of her Bible, Antonia typically prays:

Yet may not my unconscious breast  
Harbour some guilt to me unknown?  
Some wish impure, which unrepent  
You blush to see, and I to own (254)

In ignorance and repression, Antonia is kept from understanding her maturing body. Such ignorance makes her more vulnerable to Ambrosio.

Despite his own weakness, he childishly lacks tolerance of others' foibles. This is clearly seen when he fails to save the pregnant nun from the pitiless abbess, but even more strongly when he falls out of love with Matilda on learning that she is an unscrupulous as he. This fall prepares for his attempted seduction and rape of Antonia, who proves to be his own sister. By this extreme result, *The Monk* emphasizes that lack of "acceptance of human foibles" brings abominable crimes, when long suppressed instincts break forth. Such acceptance should have been learned during what Fowler terms the "Synthetic Conventional" stage (the first part of Piaget's "Formal Operational"). It is a time when "interpersonal expectations" modify the literalism of the previous stage. In monastic seclusion, however, Ambrosio has missed much opportunity for the interpersonal exchange that would have aided his development. According to common opinion, "he knows not in what consists the difference of man and woman" (44). Such ignorance is true of Antonia. Prudery leaves them unprepared to cope with the devil's wiles.

Intolerance is natural at the stage when a child interprets commands with unthinking literalness, unable to adapt them to circumstances. Recognizing the need to grow beyond this, St. Paul coined the distinction between letter and spirit. Expected to be at the latter stage, the Abbess, nonetheless, proclaims, "Agnes shall be the first to feel the rigour of those laws, which shall be obeyed to the very letter" (73).

Related to intolerance is the failure to discriminate real culpability from guilt by association. Perhaps the book's most powerful satire of this occurs when knowledge of the abbess's crimes inspires a crowd to attack not only her but also innocent nuns. While Lewis's sacrilegious crown ravages the convent, the roof collapses on them – allegory of the mindless intolerance of Catholics destroying itself.

As to magical thinking, from some perspectives all religion partakes of this. Bishop Berkeley, however, was fond of remarking that even some scientific ideas require as

much faith as religious ones. Ultimately, each culture distinguishes what is childish, magical thinking and what venerable tradition. Protestantism often condemned as the former various vestiges of the "Catholic" Middle Ages : belief in ghosts, exorcism, soothsaying, and witchcraft. Whatever the actual Catholic attitude toward ghosts, Protestants tended to assume that belief in them was tied to the doctrine of purgatory. Jacintha presumes that Elvira's ghost comes from purgatory (328). Similarly, the nuns say of a mysterious voice, "Doubtless, it proceeds from some Soul in pain, who wishes to be prayed out of purgatory: but not of us here dares to ask it the question" (362).

Interpreting those nuns' credulity poses no problem. The "ghost" is the living Agnes, hidden by the fraudulent miracle of the skeletal hand. However, there do seem to be other ghosts. The issue is the way these specters are nested in various characters' testimony. Take, for instance, the phantom of Antonia's mother. Jacintha testifies, "... I was frightened enough, and began to say my avemaria: but the ghost interrupting me uttered three loud groans, and roared out in a terrible voice, 'Oh! That chicken's wing! My poor soul suffers for it.'" Boasting of having warned her about the dangers of eating meat on Friday, Jacintha is hardly a disinterested observer but relates this as proof of her own sagacity. Has Elvira risen from the grave with the double purpose of warning her daughter and complaining about a chicken wing? Lewis can hardly be asking an Anglican readership to believe that anyone suffers in purgatory for disobeying Catholic dietary rules. If, however, Jacintha's testimony is discredited, then Antonia's perception of her mother's spirit seems likely to be a subjective experience. Comic details intrude similarly in the tale of the Bleeding Nun, recounted by a character suffering from a major accident and long sickness, thus, not entirely a trustworthy narrator. That ghost dies in the midst of mortal sins, without a moment's repentance, yet, beyond the grave, when she should know better, hopes masses may save her soul – a parody of the Catholic notion of prayers for the faithful departed. If the Bleeding Nun is to be doubted, then the exorcisms of her with Catholic paraphernalia also recede to the level of legend. The witchcraft in *The Monk* is all the work of the devil, a being in whom Anglicans generally still believed, so, from a Protestant point of view, it does not necessarily involve childish, magical thinking.

The gypsy soothsayer is another problem. She is introduced with the description, "in her hand she bore a long black rod, with which she at intervals traced a variety of singular figures upon the ground, round about which she danced in all the eccentric attitudes of folly and delirium" (59). This hardly sounds like a recommendation. On hearing Antonia's aunt express strong dislike of gypsies, the soothsayer pretends to prophesy but actually delivers a string of insults for which she need not foresee the future. Finally, though, she speaks the accurate (albeit vague) prophecy that a proud, lustful man

will destroy Antonia. Given the latter's vulnerability and the number of proud, lustful men in Lewis' Madrid, this prediction may require no preternatural skill.

Nevertheless, Lewis does not explain away the supernatural definitively in the manner of Radcliffe. The psychological understanding of repression is that earlier stages of development remain partly attractive. To the extent that they are projected on Catholicism, they lead the Protestant reader to nostalgia for a simpler past. Even Radcliffe slips into this sentiment, 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 (Radcliffe 47).

As inspiration for the protagonist's meditation, Catholic ritual forms part of legitimate spirituality (though Radcliffe's use of the word "seemed" signals a reservation). Also in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, one reads :

The holy conversation of the friar ... soothed the violence of her grief, and lifted her heart to the Being, who, extending through all place and all eternity, looks on the events of this little world as on the shadows of a moment, and beholds equally, and in the same instant, the soul that has passed the gates of death, and that, which still lingers in the body. (82)

This is not Protestant, evangelical activism, but a mystical retreat into the Eternal, the reader one with the medieval past. Radcliffe's nostalgia for Catholicism, however, does not exclude the anti-Catholicism so often discovered in the novel (e.g., Sage 32; Geary 56). Rather, the Gothic genre requires finding some appeal in the monastic past, but with a Protestant shudder at old superstitions – a gesture even-more apparent in Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797), whose villain, Schedoni, is a Dominican. Lewis's tone is less clear, his narrator sometimes adopting the perspectives of characters and sometimes commenting from an eighteenth-century, Protestant perspective. This accentuates ambivalence but does not keep *The Monk* from overflowing with anti-Catholic satire.

It is part of its age, the close of a century. The educational paradigm that dominated the Enlightenment meant that endings might seem like the time before examinations and judgements. Coupled with Christian millenarianism this brought a rush of pamphlets with the Pope as "Anti-Christ," "The Great Beast," or "Scarlet Woman." From the Spanish Armada to IRA terrorism, no century's end has lacked British turmoil over Catholicism. During the 1790s, fugitive, French aristocrats immigrated with their faith as suspect baggage and Irish Catholics campaigned more openly for suffrage, while the English feared Irish rebellion. Considering Catholicism the precondition that made the French Revolution and Terror inevitable, Anglicans expanded anti-Papist rhetoric to new

targets. Burke, though, despite his Protestant “zeal,” approved the protection of British Catholics against riots and hosted French émigré Catholic clergy (Burke 104 and 97). Indeed, there was amid fear of Papal incursion also movement toward religious toleration, especially as an alliance of Christian denominations against atheism.

As Hillel Schwartz has demonstrated, many centuries’ conclusions have borne a family resemblance to one another in apocalyptic chaos. As Complexity Theory shows, even chaos has some shape, arrayed around focuses called “strange attractors,” since they at least appear to attract because of the confused movement around them. In Protestant England, one of these was the dream/nightmare of Roman Catholicism. Religious fantasy was heresy, which, to Protestants, brought to mind Catholicism. Consequently, anti-Catholic polemics overrun the chief fantasy genre of the late eighteenth century: Gothic novels. The novels’ attitude toward the Old Faith evidences as much ambivalence as another *fin-de-siecle* work, *Hamlet* (ca. 1600), whose protagonist, schooled in Protestant Wittenberg, confronts a ghost from Catholic purgatory.

With the Bleeding Nun and Jacintha’s chicken wing, Lewis is playing, yet playing can be educational – half-serious re-examination of previous stages of thought. Near the close of a century, many of his contemporaries were doing the same: seeing how far their civilization had come, with the Gothic as a marker of its childhood. Lewis is acutely aware of himself as still young and developing. *The Monk’s* “Preface” apologizes, “I scarce have seen my twentieth year.” According to Walter Scott, he was always “boyish” – a dimunutiveness Lewis mentions in his “Preface” (quoted in Lewis 19). When he was charged with blasphemy, he excused himself to his father by saying that when he wrote the book he was still immature and had grown up much since then. His seeing the book’s treatment of religion in terms of the dichotomy maturity/immaturity is a clue as to his attitude toward it. He wrote it at the end of his teens and while occupying his first adult employment. Being a mere sinecure procured through his father, that position offered no opportunity for him to prove himself. Consequently, as his letters testified, he felt bored. He switched his attention to various projects of authorship, ways to attain adult income and status. Lewis was striving to display what he had learned of the mature values; and, as he later testified, even at nineteen his religious judgement was not yet ripe. He dedicated his literary efforts to his mother (Lewis 18). As we have seen, this closeness to her has been interpreted in many ways, but the diverse psychological approaches agree in implying his difficulty extricating himself from childhood. His individual problems obliquely mirrored his characters, and his society had its own analogues. The growth of the bourgeoisie was increasing the number of years that the upwardly mobile spent in the adolescence of formal schooling. Burke congratulated Britain on maintaining a “Gothic

and monkish education" system, but younger Englishmen may have felt as tempted to violate its compulsory celibacy as was Ambrosio in his,

If Lewis had recast the worries and desires of his time into a fantasy of Atlantean religion, the result would now seem more politically correct, but it might not have survived the centuries. One of the book's attractions has been its controversial, maliciously exciting assault on Catholicism. Today, though, readers may best use its *Bildungsroman* of damnation as opportunity to meditate on prejudice itself. The above, developmental approach to the book can guide readers to find analogies with their own struggles to mature. Seen in these general terms, Lewis's insights into vanity and other childishness have enduring value. Alas, the practice of labeling one's own temptations to regress as "Catholicism" (or some other, unpopular faith) also shows signs of having a very long future.

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