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Patriarchal Structures in Gothic Short Fiction, 1770-1820

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PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURES IN GOTHIC SHORT FICTION, 1770-1820

By

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ABSTRACT

Gothic short fiction of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in England was immensely popular with readers of all social classes and incomes. This study examines the varying models of paternity in this short fiction, and addresses what those types of paternity (biological, adoptive, and Catholic) suggest about English social, political, and religious structures of the Romantic era. Biological paternity in these tales is a precursor to Victorian ideas of masculine degeneration, a warning to fathers who might be considering neglect of their natural duties of care and love in favor of “social monstrosity.” There are no positive biological fathers in these texts, and all the fathers who behave improperly are punished by death or solitude. Fathers are encouraged to hold to the accepted, traditional English structure of masculinity and paternity that called for care of one’s family through hard work and honesty. Adoptive paternity appears in a different way; because the very idea of adoption threatened the English patriarchal system of the late 1700s, adoption was stigmatized and was outside the law when these stories were written. The effects of this status in gothic short fiction are highly indicative of English national attitudes, solidifying the notion that adoption was a hazardous undertaking in almost all situations (both for the parents and children). Finally, Catholic paternity emphasizes the ideal of “England” in comparison to other European countries, specifically France, toward which the English were notably hostile and suspicious. When Catholics of all kinds appear in gothic short stories, they are objects of fear, scorn, and distrust, even if they perform a handful of good deeds. Thus, the paternal influence of Catholic priests is portrayed as a system of cruelty and greed.
INTRODUCTION

Though the English gothic novel is a well-known genre, with roots in the literature of the eighteenth century, the gothic short story is less thoroughly examined. Gothic novels were widely circulated in their time and now appear consistently on collegiate course reading lists; however, the short fiction of the period – though equally popular – has received a great deal less critical attention. This project, therefore, proposes to focus specifically on gothic short fiction in its analysis of fatherhood, paternity, and their various portrayals.

My primary source is a 1993 collection of short gothic stories, *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, edited by Chris Baldick, which includes “The Poisoner of Montremos” (by Richard Cumberland, 1791), “The Friar’s Tale” (anonymous, 1792), “The Parricide Punished” (anonymous, 1799), “The Ruins of the Abbey of Fitz-Martin” (anonymous, 1801), and “The Vindictive Monk” (by Isaac Crookenden, 1802). Though not a complete collection of the popular short stories in circulation at the time, this volume does provide an effective sampling of topics, lengths, and dates (ranging from 1773 to 1802). Other examples of gothic “shilling shockers” with a slightly greater range of publication dates are found in *The Shilling Shockers: Stories of Terror from the Gothic Bluebooks* (1978), edited by Peter Haining. From these ten tales, I use these four: “The Mysterious Novice” (by Sarah Wilkinson, 1809), “Captive of the Banditti” (by Dr. Nathan Drake and “A.N. Other”, 1801), “The Bride of the Isles” (anonymous, 1820), and “The Severed Arm” (anonymous, circa 1820).

In gothic writing from England in the early Romantic period, the problem of paternity surfaces almost immediately. At a time when adoption was in question, writers often represented surrogate fathers in their writing in sharp contrast to the biological fathers whose support of and love for their children was simply assumed (though the reality was often in sharp and painful contrast). In addition, another type of fatherhood – that of priests in the Catholic Church – was an intense issue in staunchly Protestant England, portrayals of which provided fascinating spectacles for curious readers.
To date, little criticism on fatherhood in fiction of the time is available; almost none is found in reference to gothic texts. Aside from discussions of legal ramifications and questions of adoption, writings on fatherhood take a remote backseat to discussions of motherhood and maternity. In fact, much of the focus on gender of any kind in gothic literature has revolved around the construction of femininity and womanliness, including criticism on love and family relationships. Available criticism on masculinity skirts the area of Romantic fiction, however, even if it does target the gothic in general. Andrew Smith, for example, devotes a chapter in his *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity, and the Gothic at the Fin-de-Siècle* (2004) to the idea of degeneration in gothic fiction and nineteenth-century Britain. Essentially, discussions of fatherhood – both biological and adoptive – are rare when the topic is the Romantic gothic.

The issue of Catholic portrayal in English gothic fiction has been critically addressed much more than the portrayal of traditional fatherhood. Several noted sources give attention to Catholicism, but focus almost entirely on Victorian gothic novels. Victor Sage (*Horror Fiction in the Protestant Tradition*, 1988) notes that the attraction of Catholicism for English readers was that of spectacle, an idea that closely aligns with the popularity of fiction that portrayed Catholics in a poor light. Others, such as Diana Peschier (*Nineteenth-Century Anti-Catholic Discourses: The Case of Charlotte Brontë*, 2005) and Susan M. Griffin (*Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 2004) focus their critiques specifically on women, either through analysis of portrayals of nuns as surrogate mother figures or the abuses of women in the Catholic Church. However, neither of these writers has specifically given attention to the priest’s role as a father figure to both men and women in fiction. One older source, a 1946 dissertation by Sister Mary Muriel Tarr entitled *Catholicism in Gothic Fiction*, offers a more complete look at the Romantic period in English literature, specifically examining how Catholic references aided in the construction of the genre that finally came to be known as “gothic” in the first place.

The gothic in 18th century England famously began with Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764. For British readers of works such as *The Castle of Otranto* (set in Italy between 1095 and 1243), the nostalgia of this form was for a long-departed history. Additionally, aside from the tale’s supernatural occurrences, the very content of the story is foreign to many of its English readers: it was hundreds of years removed from their own time; it involved members of the Catholic faith, one that they had publicly denounced centuries before and now openly contested; and it was set in foreign lands, thrilling readers with objects of
fascination in the characters that lived (and sinned) as most English citizens could not imagine, or at least preferred to pretend they could never experience. The characteristics of *The Castle of Otranto* became synonymous with the genre of gothic fiction, and continued to appear throughout gothic writing in England during the next decades. Essentially, *The Castle of Otranto* is the emblematic gothic novel.

This thesis contains three chapters on the subject of paternity in gothic short fiction, each addressing one type of paternity. The first chapter focuses on biological paternity. In it, I discuss the constant appearance of abuse by biological fathers in the short stories “Captive of the Banditti,” “The Parricide Punished,” “The Severed Arm,” and “The Bride of the Isles.” I argue that such recurrent abuse appears as a warning to readers of the shilling shockers that this shirking of a man’s natural duty results in retribution that can range from death to torture or deep sorrow. Chapter two addresses adoptive paternity. This chapter uses the texts “The Vindictive Monk,” “The Mysterious Novice,” and “The Poisoner of Montremos” to examine the treatment of adopted children by their surrogate fathers. Though gothic short fiction generally portrayed events in such fantastic proportions that they could not be considered realistic, I propose that the appearance and treatment of adopted children is the closest thing to realism that these authors could muster. The final chapter examines the appearance of father figures such as priests and monks in the Catholic Church. “The Ruins of the Abbey of Fitz-Martin,” “The Friar’s Tale,” and “The Poisoner of Montremos” are three stories that prominently feature Catholics in positions of power that lead to their corruption. I argue that such negative portrayals of Catholicism specifically appear as a political measure in staunchly Protestant England; however, a deeper look reveals that the Catholic Church has no opportunity for redemption because of its lack of feminine mother figures. I also claim that the undistinguishable portrayal of Catholic men and women leads to a masculinization of the Church designed to strengthen English prejudices against it.

In my research and discussion I question the tropes that are common in gothic fiction and approach them with a critical eye to their structure and purpose, seeking in the end a deeper understanding of the role of fatherhood in Romantic English society and in the literature of the day. A close reading, paying distinct attention to historical contexts relating to religion and the political sphere, is crucial in my discussion of paternity. What do these portrayals and fascinations mean for English readers and their opinions of foreigners, fathers, and Catholics as a
whole? What effect do these portrayals of fatherhood have on the idea of God as a holy expression of earthly fatherhood? Of equal interest is the idea of “moral monstrosity,” providing an angle from which to examine the father figures in each text in regards to his social transgressions.
CHAPTER 1

BIOLOGICAL PATERNITY

As the gothic craze swept Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, much fiction that appeared in short story and novel form contained predictable tales of haunting, monsters, and shocking cruelty. Theoretically, it was such horrific incidents that compelled readers to continue their consumption of cheap chapbooks and bluebooks and more expensive bound novels; however, often the most appalling behavior in such stories does not proceed from villains or ghosts but from that which is expected to be safe and familiar. To terrify an audience meant dislodging security in that which was held most dear, a technique English authors experimented with as they composed tales that involved the cruelty of family.

In my discussion on biological paternity, I examine the appearance of fathers as the most horrific villains in such gothic short fiction as “Captive of the Banditti,” “The Parricide Punished,” “The Severed Arm,” and “The Bride of the Isles.” My claim is that biological fathers who behaved in such atrocious ways consistently received punishment for their crimes – whether by political powers, cutthroat villains, or God in the course of natural events; a father who has mistreated his son or daughter is never permitted to partake of a happy ending. The result of this trend in gothic writing is that such short stories appear as precursors to the Victorian gothic fiction that demonstrated the results of masculine degeneration in the form of “real” monsters. Thus, the use of a father as a monster can be read as a warning to men who find themselves playing out eighteenth-century traditional masculinity: that of hard-working husband and father. The horror is found not when a fanged beast ravages the city, but when a man dares to shirk his natural duty.

Such tales can be aligned very closely with the novel that is emblematic of social monstrosity, Jane Austen’s Northanger Abbey. Though published in 1818, the text was sold in 1802 and likely written in the late 1790s, making it a prime response to macabre tales such as those so avidly consumed by readers of bluebooks and chapbooks in the late eighteenth century.
Northanger Abbey addressed the rabid fascination readers found in haunted castles and crumbling monasteries with a look at English intelligence and humanity. Catherine Morland, a young and impressionable girl, finds herself enthralled with the fiction of Ann Radcliffe and other gothic writers, going so far as to believe that the time she spends with her friend Eleanor Tilney in a historic abbey will lead to intrigue and terror like the kind she has encountered in her reading. However, Catherine makes no such discovery, instead finding the abbey to be well kept and charming and completely absent of mystery. In response to Catherine’s obsession with gothic romances, Austen guides her character to discover that rotting manuscripts and hidden graves are unlikely to have any bearing on realistic life. However, Austen also famously exemplifies the idea that monstrous or inhumane behavior by trusted members of English society can be much more terrifying than anything one might read in a cheap gothic bluebook containing supernatural elements, noting that, for Catherine, “The anxieties of common life began soon to succeed to the alarms of romance” (138). Eleanor and Henry Tilney’s overbearing father, General Tilney, becomes a much-feared character at the heart of the story. Believing that Catherine is only interested in his son’s company for his wealth, the General sends Catherine away from his home in a rented carriage with no ceremony, money, or escort, leaving Catherine hurt, dishonored, and vulnerable. In the end, “Catherine, at any rate, heard enough to feel, that in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty” (170). Austen’s novel was meant to counteract the intrigue of other gothic writing by pointing out many more realistic horrors than the poorly written chapbooks and closer to what readers would understand. Interestingly, much gothic short fiction that surrounded Austen’s novel also shows evidence of this same attitude; though these stories still contain episodes of romantic exploits and exotic tradition (unlike Austen’s text situated in familiar England), much of the behavior that appears as fearful is situated not in the supernatural but in the frighteningly familiar.

One very noticeable trend in eighteenth-century gothic short fiction is that biological fathers – those that English society would naturally expect to be the most protective and supportive of their children – are most often portrayed as power-hungry, cruel, and financially focused. They demonstrate no filial love for their children, often leading both parties to death and heartache. William W. Watt quite accurately and comically sums up the conventional role of fatherhood in such short stories in his essay “Shilling Shockers of the Gothic School”:
It is the important duty of the tyrannical parent or guardian of the shilling shockers to object to any matrimonial aspirations which his child may entertain and to put forth his own candidate for the office. The most common of the shocker fathers is the “retired crusader” who has won undying fame for his military exploits in the Holy Land and is ready to settle down to a quiet old age in his ancestral mansion. Unwilling to have his family name disgraced by the unequal marriage of his daughter, he is quick to imprison her in a convent the moment she suggests such a thing […] Not infrequently the shocker father is a monster of cruelty (43).

The frighteningly malicious behavior of gothic fathers in these short stories can be attributed to what Lieve Spaas calls “a profound difference between the biological reality of paternity and the cultural construct of fatherhood” in the essay “Mythical Constructs and Social Realities” (1). Though fathers were inarguably in a place of biological authority over the children in their care, the choice to behave in a benign and socially acceptable manner was less strictly governed, though readers would hold that nature still commanded filial love for sons and daughters. Rejection of that nature meant inhuman behavior, and this was a threat to the social hierarchy that held an important balance of power in England between fathers and sons, emblematic of that between the crown and the people.

That such a long-established structure could be threatened because of one party shirking responsibility was unquestioned; the tumult of the French Revolution left England with a dark fear of a transformation of power. Beyond that, however, there existed a realization that crumbling family structure threatened the nation. In France, radical sons had thrown off the authority of overbearing fathers in order to participate in the Revolution without threat of disinheritance; the result was a chaotic weakening of paternal power and responsibility, and France was left to legislate such authority back into practice with the Napoleonic Code. England’s fathers, then, would be expected to behave in a manner that commanded love and respect from their children in hopes of staving off such an upheaval of the social system.

The content of gothic short fiction, however, often portrays fathers who do not follow their assigned duties and thus face the estrangement of their children and even the loss of life and

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1 Xavier Martin’s essay “The Paternal Role and the Napoleonic Code” looks specifically at what this new focus on paternity did to France; for a time, an unmarried citizen was seen as “a political monster” (28), and “[n]o man [was] a good citizen unless he be a […] good father” (29). The Code also put new emphasis on property and inheritance, which seemed to affirm that a solid patriarchal structure such as the one England sought to protect was the most reliable way to run a nation.
property. In a time when adherence to the laws of nature and the crown meant the security of the
country, these paternal figures appeared as the terrifying reality that could bring down a nation
through the maltreatment of the children they should have loved.

One of the most common tales involving paternal cruelty includes a father who gives his
daughter a difficult choice: either marry the man of his choosing (said man gaining an extensive
fortune in the bargain) or be confined in a convent for the rest of her days (allowing the fortune
to pass to a villainous cousin or conniving member of the Catholic Church). The use of the
convent as a form of punishment and power and the absolute control of Catholicism and its
members are fascinating occurrences that are discussed in Chapter 3; however, the convention of
the pitiless biological father is one that warrants examination, as its appearance in these short
stories is extensive.

“Captive of the Banditti: A Terrific Tale Concluded” (1801) is just one example of the
disturbing trend. The back story of this interesting tale makes the plot doubly intriguing: it was
published originally as a fragment by a Dr. Nathan Drake, leaving the reader hanging at the
escape of the story’s hero, Henry de Montmorency, from a band of banditti that has already
murdered two of his companions. However, an anonymous writer who called himself “A.N
Other” later completed the story and the pieces were published together. Thus, the relation of the
history of the distressed damsel Dorothee is not a part of the original piece of writing. The taste
of the fantastic that the continuing writer employs, however, is in direct alignment both with the
mood of the rest of the short story and the conventional sensation genre of the late eighteenth
century.

In this piece, de Montmorency first sees Dorothee chained to a wall in the banditti’s cave,
causing him to rush to her aid. Nothing is known of her history, however, until the two escapees
stumble across one another later in a secluded glen (after the second author’s continuation of the
tale). At this point, Dorothee tells de Montmorency her story: as per gothic convention, she is
the only daughter of a rich landed baron, and beautiful enough to attract the attention of many
suitors. Her father commands her marriage to a knight named Edelbert, despite the fact that “[a]
secret horror thrilled through her whole frame whenever her eyes met his” (68). The expression
of such “repugnance” (68) to her father serves no purpose; the baron is determined to go ahead

2 Robert D. Mayo’s discussion of the gothic published fragment is invaluable. He describes that the convention of
the fragment was intended as a cheap thrill in magazines, generally starting in the midst of some action and breaking
off abruptly at a crucial point. See pp. 776-778.
with the wedding, “lured by the ancestry of his [Edelbert’s] family, and the vast domains he pretended to be possessed of” (68). By story’s end, however, Dorothee is proven right: Edelbert is a villainous liar, deeply in debt, who kidnaps Dorothee and kills the baron in order to inherit his lands more quickly. The heroic de Montmorency, however, thwarts both plans and Dorothee and the young hero are wed.

The baron in this story gives his daughter no ultimatum of death or captivity if she does not accept his wishes, but he does forcefully direct her toward a loveless and economically based marriage. That disregard for a daughter’s feelings would be more than enough to gain the sympathy of most English readers. Compared to the actions of some other gothic fathers, however, the baron’s behavior is tame. Josepha’s father in “The Poisoner of Montremos” actually poisons his own daughter in a foiled effort to kill his adopted son. Matilda’s father in “The Friar’s Tale” banishes her to a convent when she falls in love with a poor man, then bequeaths her inheritance to her malicious cousin Conrad. Sir Emanfred, Anna’s father in “The Ruins of the Abbey of Fitz-Martin,” declares to his (already married) daughter that unless she marries the titled man of his choosing she will be banished from his sight forever, leading to her horrible death in the dungeons of a local convent.

Such transgressive fathers are consistently punished for their monstrous behavior, placing the villain of the shilling shocker in a place to receive his just deserts by the hand of a young hero or through the might of God. Violators of what English readers might consider natural laws – filial love and responsibility, for example – were never part of a happy ending and consistently took part in the short story’s conventional message of virtue rewarded and punishment of the wicked.

The gothic short story quite often included an overt moral in an effort to make the readings more acceptable in respected circles, as Robert D. Mayo notes in “Gothic Romance in the Magazines.” He writes that “Gothic romance in the magazines was forced to encounter not only the unfavorable conditions of serial publication, but the marked hostility of many critics, editors, and members of the general reading audience, in whose eyes romance was the hallmark for barbarous superstition, unreason, moral depravity, and bad taste” (787). Thus stories that might keep idle young boys dreaming of midnight sword fights and leave flighty women sighing over a heroic knight were justified to the majority of the reading public with quick, sometimes relevant morals inserted into their final sentences. One notable example of such a loosely related
moral is that of “The Friar’s Tale,” which lets readers walk away from a story consisting mostly of intrigue, bloodshed, and young love with the reminder that “True religion […] howsoever it may vary in outward ceremonies, or articles of faith, will always teach you to do good, to love and help each other” (22).

Dictates of proper paternal conduct were less frequently verbalized and more often left to the stories’ shock value, however. A more accurate and memorable moral message than the one described in “The Friar’s Tale” was often obvious in the horrendous behavior and punishment of a transgressive father. Essentially, the tales of unkind fathers served as a warning to their readers; their sad fates speak for themselves when the height of their crimes becomes known. In “Captive of the Banditti,” for example, Dorothee’s father is murdered by the very man he had hoped to make his son-in-law as he watches his only daughter being carried off as a captive. “The Friar’s Tale” leaves Matilda’s father dead of old age before he can enjoy the forgiveness and marriage of his banished daughter. Vitoria’s father, the Marquis Sperreth of “The Mysterious Novice,” is plagued by the memory of his lifetime of abuse and wrath; he dies without seeing either his estranged daughter or granddaughter again. Josepha’s father, the penitent monk in “The Poisoner of Montremos,” kills himself in anguish over the deaths of every member of his family. None of the gothic fathers is free to live without guilt and consistently spends his last moments seeking to right the wrongs of a long and haughty life.

One story that specifically and shockingly portrays the conventional punishment of a father is the anonymously published “The Parricide Punished” (1799). In this tale, a guest at the marriage of the daughter of the powerful and wealthy (yet notably disagreeable) Monsieur de Vildac is housed in an old tower of an ancestral castle. In the middle of the night, he is awakened by the entry of an old man, half-naked and dragging chains, who seeks out the room’s fire for warmth. The old man tells the guest that he is the father of de Vildac – the grandfather of the newly married daughter – and has been confined as a prisoner in the tower for years. His son, the unpleasant nobleman, had had him kidnapped and imprisoned twenty years before, faking his death in order to receive the old man’s fortune. Alarmed and shocked, the wedding guest urges the elder de Vildac to escape with him that very night and report his situation, so to speak, to the authorities; however, the old man refuses. He is, he claims, now receiving his just reward: in his youth, he had murdered his own father in that very room. The guest leaves the castle in disgust and awe, writing to a friend that he cannot believe “[h]ow […] it is possible that
humanity can produce wickedness so intolerable and unnatural” (30). This tale has not stepped lightly around the issue: such wicked behavior among families meant to be loving and protective is no less than “unnatural.” In the all-too-common pattern of transgression and punishment, the guilty murderer realizes the extent of his guilt at the moment when his own son revisits his sins upon him.

It is only when their deaths are imminent that gothic fathers note the error of their ways and seek reconciliation. Some call children in for forgiveness, or make bedside confessions to trusted servants. Marriages might be condoned, fortunes and titles restored, or pardon for presumed sins granted; the important thing is that such moralizing makes it very clear that death and old age are not the appropriate time for mercy. Rather, such absolution should be a standard part of human existence and interaction; if the cruel fathers would take steps to make amends with their children before the eve of their demise, life might be longer or simply more fulfilling. Violent or sorrowful deaths are the penance that monstrous fathers must pay to regain their humanity and to assure their salvation at the end of a life absent of remorse. Such a tactic might serve an even greater purpose than the often-irrelevant verbal moralizing; after all, what parent would pursue the harassment of their child if the penalty were to be death? In this interpretation, the role of the gothic father was actually that of a negative example; he is not only a shocking figure, but also a warning, to those readers who might be in a position to imitate his cruelty, of the consequences – social and spiritual – of such indiscretions.

When examining the intended response of an eighteenth-century reader, it is important to note the likely audience of such tales. As Peter Haining discusses in the introduction to Shilling Shockers: Tales of Terror From the Gothic Bluebooks (1978), bluebooks were initially a response by the “cheaper presses” (14) to readers who would not be able to afford the lengthy and expensive gothic novel but still desired the terror and intrigue that the trend brought to Britain. He specifically notes schoolboys and the working readership in his assessment; though consumption of gothic bluebooks was not limited to those with little extra income, the audiences were undeniably economically driven, as citizens with property or higher incomes could afford to purchase the expensive and attractive leather bound original novels that bluebooks quite often plagiarized for a cheap thrill³. William St. Clair’s assessment in The Reading Nation (2004) also

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³ Haining, Watt, and Mayo write intriguing accounts of chapbook and bluebook publication standards; essentially, with limited or no copyright laws at the time, much classic writing such as that by Ann Radcliffe or Matthew Lewis
specifies that while the readership of chapbooks depended upon income, there was no notable distinction in the age, gender, or education of those with just enough resources to purchase a cheap chapbook:

Amongst the larger constituencies for chapbooks and ballads during the whole print era were adults in the country areas, and young people in both the town and the country. It would be a mistake, therefore, to regard the ancient popular print as confined to those whose education fitted them for nothing longer or textually more difficult. Many readers, whether adults or children, lived at the boundary between the reading and the non-reading nations. They were the marginal reading constituency whose numbers fell when prices rose and rose when prices fell. Both groups of readers often felt apologetic, or were made to feel guilty, for enjoying this form of reading [...] to judge from the many warnings against the reading of romance to be found in conduct books, women were among the readership from the earliest times (343).

This readership’s demographic plays an important role in the further interpretation of the character of the tyrannical gothic father in such short stories. The characters involved in the gothic tales are consistently wealthy, landed gentry, viewed with fascination from a distance by readers such as schoolboys or laborers to whom luxury and leisure were foreign. They would be familiar with work and productivity; finances might be limited, but dedication meant security. Leisure was out of reach, but honest labor and a character of perseverance assured – at least in theory – a strong family dynamic and the necessities of life. These characteristics were in direct contrast to the life of idleness evidenced in the landed gentry and aristocracy. Daily activities revolved not around work but around entertainment; women and men alike were much more delicate and privileged than their lower-class counterparts.

Such class differences are very apparent to Andrew Smith in his book *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity, and the Gothic at the Fin-de-Siècle* (2004). He argues that by the Victorian era, privileged masculinity had been called into question by writings such as Max Nordau’s *Degeneration*, an attack on the decadence of the period. Such idle and luxurious attitudes, he claims, meant that the upper class’s excess and corruption were called into question was subject to plagiarism, including drastic shortening and an amazingly simplified plot. This trend explains why many of the story lines of these stories are similar and predictable, and also why even names often remained unchanged from tale to tale (making for great confusion when discussing one story or another).

Both Haining and St. Clair note that Percy Bysshe Shelley was among the avid readership of gothic bluebooks when he was a schoolboy.
and that the lower and middle classes were challenged with an image of true masculinity that included hard work rather than leisure. Additionally, that type of masculinity meant secure gender roles and the continuation of the traditional family structure. Under attack were wanton idleness and the sexual promiscuity and physical disease to which it led. Smith specifically examines pieces of fiction of the late nineteenth century in which one can see examples of the fear of masculine degeneration, among them *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. In his argument, gothic writers utilized the fear and excess of monstrosity to shock readers into an attitude of “true” (or traditional and respectable) British masculinity.

Though Smith is discussing a cultural phenomenon that occurred nearly a century after the era in question in this study, the roots of his arguments can be seen in the gothic fiction of the late eighteenth century and in its consumption by working class readers. Noticeably, the characters in these short stories are all part of a privileged population: “The Poisoner of Montremos,” “The Friar’s Tale,” “The Parricide Punished,” “The Ruins of the Abbey of Fitz-Martin,” and “The Vindictive Monk” are only a handful of examples that include wealth, land, and inheritance as central themes. Also universal among them are the characters of a father and his son or daughter. These same tales consistently portray the greed, corruption, and cruelty of the father toward his child, and such maltreatment originates without fail in a question of finances and birthright. For the wealthy characters in these tales, labor is not an option; leisure and luxury leave them long hours to practice their malice and cruelty. Unquestionably, there is a distinct association in the writings between paternal cruelty and the massive wealth with which the father is endowed. Affluence becomes associated with familial emptiness and unfatherly/unmanly behavior, and the unspoken message is clear. These short stories appear as precursors to the monster tales of the Victorian era that warned their readers against decadence and idleness; the bluebooks of the late eighteenth century thus evidenced a contrast between the upper and working classes that was meant to evoke determination and productivity.

Another precursor to a Victorian ideal can be seen in these short gothic tales as well. In the Victorian mindset that a man could become corrupted by his interactions with society, there was a strong belief that he needed a pure and supportive wife in the home to counteract the negative effects of the business he had conducted during the day. This phenomenon concerning a woman’s role, known as the angel in the house, resulted in more solidly defined gender roles.
for women and the solidification of the long-held belief that a woman had no place in society outside the good she did for her husband and children in the home.

Though the need for a solid, morally upstanding woman in the home is not distinctly verbalized in these short stories, her universal absence means that the rest of the household will crumble, beginning with the father. Consistently, shilling shockers portrayed a widower raising children alone and ineffectually. Both Matilda of “The Friar’s Tale” and Dorothee of “Captive of the Banditti” are the only children of a man who has no redeeming female influence in his life beyond the daughter under his absolute control. If we view these men with the Victorian suggestion that they would be corrupted by interaction with society outside the home, it is obvious that such corruption is manifested in their tyrannical behavior toward those they are meant to protect. Each man’s unwillingness or inability to behave as a gentleman and a protective father is thus a direct result of the absence of a wife and mother in the home environment. The home, when unprotected by an angel, becomes a haven for a monster.

In the course of this study, most fathers who perform outlandishly are simply exposing the worse side of their human character. However, one intriguing tale published around 1820 exemplifies the father who actually becomes a monster in his dealings with the world around him. “The Severed Arm, Or, The Wehr-wolf of Limousin” tells the story of a widower and his daughter who take a set of rooms in a run-down country estate in the French village of St. Yrieux. Once the Count Gaspar de Marcanville, the father is reduced to the status of a banished peasant hunter through the villainy of the French court. He leaves his daughter, Adele, in the rooms for days on end without companionship or explanation, living “a wild life in the adjacent mountains and forests” (159) and periodically bringing her the spoils of his hunts. However, he makes it clear that if it were not for Adele, he would prefer to avoid the company of people entirely. The town becomes plagued by werewolf attacks, and lives in fear after nightfall. One evening, when the king of France makes an unexpected visit to the little village, a werewolf attacks the entourage. One of the soldiers in the king’s envoy slays the wolf, causing him to morph back into his true shape: the hunter Hubert, once the Count Gaspar.

This tale exemplifies the extent of a father’s propensity for treachery and, quite literally, monstrous behavior. His exposure to the rigors of the countryside makes him vulnerable to the bite of the werewolf – the corrupting influence that makes him inhuman. Without a wife to create the comfort of a safe home atmosphere, Hubert has no desire to be in the company of
humans at all, choosing instead the wild monstrosity of manhood that had lurked below the surface when he was the Count Gaspar. His reserve in the French court was what Cyndy Hendershot, author of The Animal Within: Masculinity and the Gothic (1998) calls “a veneer that conceals multiplicity and fragmentation” (1). The loss of that reserve led to his being consumed by his inner, irrational, and inhuman self; his degeneration is so extreme that he is beyond salvation or social inclusion. Therefore, the vindication for his sin is his death, leaving his already almost-abandoned daughter with no protector or provider. In his propensity for the inhuman(e), Hubert is the extreme father-monster figure of gothic short fiction.

The other extreme of a gothic father is a figure who almost seems to mock the convention of the abusive, uncaring, and monstrous single parent. While every other biological father in this study exemplifies uniform standards of cruel or heartless behavior, one father character performs the expected literary paternal actions but from a completely different motivation.

“The Bride of the Isles” was published anonymously in 1820 in response to what Peter Haining calls the “sensation” (127) generated by John Polidori’s The Vampire (1819). This early vampire tale claims that vampires were wicked spirits allowed to remain on earth in the body of a recently vacated corpse as long as they were able to yearly wed a young virgin, kill her on All-Hallows Eve, and drink her blood, earning them another year on earth. The vampire in this story is Oscar Montcalm, an infamous Scottish murderer, who inhabits the body of the valiant knight Ruthven, the fiancé of Lady Margaret. Of course, Lady Margaret is the beautiful only daughter of Lord Ronald, a wealthy and landed widower. Lord Ronald discovers that Ruthven is in fact inhabited by a vampire, and does all he can through both reason and physical violence to stop Margaret’s wedding, much like the cruel gothic fathers of other shilling shockers did. She reacts in kind: she is angry with her father, vows to either continue with the wedding or elope, and even accuses him of being insane. Though Lord Ronald is filling the conventional role that Watt describes in forbidding his daughter’s marriage to the man of her choosing, he does so for a very unconventional reason. Rather than being interested in wealth or title (both of which Ruthven possesses), such as the fathers in “The Friar’s Tale” or “The Ruins of the Abbey of Fitz-Martin,” he is genuinely interested in his daughter’s protection. Readers would note that unusual trait in his behavior; however, the other participants in the tale cannot see him as anything more than the tyrannical gothic father who would appear in any other setting. Lord Ronald is evidence of how thoroughly the expected behavior of any wealthy single father was ingrained into a reading
audience of the early nineteenth century. Even as he attempts to appear as the hero of the story by selflessly defending his daughter’s life, he cannot escape the stigma that accompanies biological paternity and condemns him as a monster. This struggle continues throughout the course of the story; it is only with great difficulty and at the risk of his own life that Lord Ronald is able to save his daughter from her impending doom.

Such an examination of this short story allows for a greater understanding of the figure of monstrous father as a negative example for paternal (or even human) behavior. While the affluent fathers who abused their children and the literal monster of “The Severed Arm” appeared as warnings to the fathers of England camouflaged in stories of intrigue and drama, Lord Ronald is a model of filial love and responsibility who puts his own safety at risk in order to protect those he loves. In every other case, the male honored with the role of hero and savior is a young and hopeful suitor; here, it is a determined father. The anonymous author of this story therefore offers a challenge to English readers with his acknowledgement that good does in fact exist in wealthy fathers; however, it is important to note how late this tale appears in relation to the other pieces examined as part of this study of Romantic gothic short fiction. The more rational behavior of the father in “The Bride of the Isles” is similar to the plea for intelligence that Henry Tilney gives Catherine Morland in Austen’s Northanger Abbey with the exclamation, “Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you” (136). After over thirty years of repetitive and uncanny story lines and conventional, innately cruel characters that fascinated the English reading public, Lord Ronald breaks tradition with genuine concern and goodness, a character who seeks to redeem at least some members of the landed gentry. Additionally, the removal of the familiar father as the feared monster allows later authors to situate the threat of invasion from a foreign place – as seen in Dracula, for example – as a more serious and eminent danger. The gothic father, then, serves an important place in the world of literary history as he provides the character of the terrifying villain and the model of a life gone awry for eager readers. However, like other conventions of the gothic, he is a figure that appears and moves on, allowing for further exploration by the writers of sensation fiction as they sought ever more shocking architects of terror.
CHAPTER 2

ADOPTIVE AND SURROGATE PATERNITY

In contrast to the legal position of a legitimate biological child portrayed under the thumb of his oppressive father in eighteenth century England, other forms of fatherhood emerge in gothic short fiction as indicative of the delicate social balance that patriarchy was built upon. While biological fathers might be as tyrannical as they chose (with consequences, of course, as described in Chapter 1), their position of authority and the solidity of their family’s place in landed society was without question. Adoption, however, appears as a social issue with the potential to disrupt a long held view of family structure. Such stories as “The Vindictive Monk,” “The Poisoner of Montremos,” and “The Mysterious Novice” appear as popular gothic representations of the problematic state of illegal adoption in eighteenth century England – a trend that, while it existed, could almost be concealed as a family’s most incriminating secret; the results of this viewpoint impacted the children of surrogate fathers throughout their lives. Thus, I argue that the treatment of adoption as a dark blemish as noted in these short stories is a surprisingly accurate portrayal of English readers’ innate understanding and strongly held belief in the foundations of their deeply patriarchal culture. Though most gothic short fiction varies from reality in their intense use of dramatic events and exotic adventures, I claim that the portrayal of adoption is realistic and indicative of the social and political attitudes of English patriarchy.

It was not until 1926 that the first formal adoption law was passed in England. The Adoption Act allowed adoptive parents, for the first time, to hold the same rights as biological parents in regards to their children. Before that, the place of an adopted child in a household was precarious for many reasons. Specifically, as Mary Kathleen Benet points out in The Politics of Adoption (1976), formal adoption laws threatened the very structure of English patriarchal
society. With a strict reliance on primogeniture based in a history of feudalism, the inclusion of an adopted child in inheritance meant a break in the formal rights to property ownership. Much land could not be passed to the recipient of a father’s choice (such as a second son or nephew or, in this case, an adopted son); this meant that unless a family might hope to pass off an adopted child as their own, they had no hope of securing an inheritance for the child they had raised.

Such pressure also implied that foster or adoptive parents had a deep interest in protecting the identity of their child, yet had no recourse under the law to do so. While it was crucial that no neighbors or friends discover the true nature of a child’s history, parents had to rely upon whatever means necessary to hide the fact that they might have purchased, stolen, or even merely found their infant. Benet notes that this meant that the child’s biological parents always “had the legal right to claim him back. Foster parents who had grown attached to their child might pay blackmail money rather than surrender him” (62). While parental love, even coming from a surrogate family, would seem reason enough to pay money for a longstanding claim on a child, an adoptive father with a special interest in his surrogate son’s inheritance – the landed gentry, for example – would find it especially necessary to protect the identity of the child that was not his own.

The fear of legal adoption was not only based in inheritance and family structure, but also in the concept of English identity. While adoption was not legalized in England until the twentieth century, the French were dealing with issues of adoption much earlier. The French Revolution resulted in a large number of orphans throughout the country, and rather than being stigmatized as “unwanted”, as in England, these children were viewed with a much different attitude. They were children of the nation, literally the future of the Revolution’s social changes and political ideas. Thus, the care of these children was a national duty, and adoption was accepted and encouraged. The English, however, were dealing with deep issues of Francophobia; fear of the Revolution in England played a part, as did suspicion of the family of the exiled Catholic king James II. “French” ideas and customs were scorned, and the practice of taking strangers into the home without question was likely among them. With this view, a family with an adopted child might not be only at risk of losing an inheritance structure, but also of being labeled “un-English.” Obviously, this stigma of adoption served as yet another reason that adoptive parents would want to conceal the biological parentage of their children.
This trend of secrecy surrounding non-legal adoption of all kinds is noticeably present in many gothic short stories of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Because they focused on the escapades of the wealthy, it would come as no surprise to an English reader that a surrogate father was eager to pass off an adopted son as his own. “The Vindictive Monk” by Isaac Crookenden (1802) is one such example. Calini, a young Italian gentleman “descended of good family” and “heir to great and still-increasing wealth” has been raised to consider himself “the last representative of an honorable house” (51). However, one day he is taken aside by his loving father and given a shocking revelation: the man he has always considered his own parent had found him abandoned on a beach as an infant twenty years before. The only clue to Calini’s background is a ring that was found with him on the beach, bearing the engraving Ollorini.

In this tale, Calini’s adoptive father turns out to be a much kinder and stouthearted caregiver than his biological father. Calini’s reaction to the tale is to be deeply shaken by the “barbarity” (52) of his real father, but in the early stages of “The Vindictive Monk” he has yet to discover the true extent of his biological father’s tyranny. When he is later kidnapped and thrown into a dungeon by the treacherous mercenary Sceloni in order that his rival Halbruzi might marry Calini’s betrothed (Alexa), Calini gives himself up for dead. However, Sceloni sees the aforementioned ring on the young hero’s hand and does not carry out his orders to kill Calini; instead, he reveals that he (Sceloni) is Calini’s father, the very man who had abandoned him on the beach and murdered his own wife because he suspected her to be unfaithful and the child the result of an adulterous relationship. Stricken with guilt, Sceloni begs for Calini’s forgiveness before he retreats to his monastery and is never seen again. Calini escapes from the dungeon, kills Halbruzi, marries Alexa, and lives out a happy life in the company of the man who has served the true paternal role in his life – his adopted father.

The treachery of biological fatherhood has already been discussed in Chapter 1; Sceloni serves as yet another example of an errant father who is punished by separation from his child and, in this case, the world as he disappears behind the monastery’s walls. To English readers, he is an object of scorn and a caution. More intriguing in this story, however, is the behavior of surrogate parents such as Calini’s adopted father and the orphaned Alexa’s doting aunt, who take steps to protect and love their children in ways that biological parents seldom do in gothic short fiction.
The fact that Calini has been raised to believe himself heir to a large estate and the last of a fading bloodline is the reason for concealing his adoptive status both from him and others. Because adoption bore – and, to some extent, still retains – a stigma of illegitimacy or undesirability, it would be hopeless to think that a child picked up arbitrarily from a shore with no history or name might be respected and followed as a nobleman. Additionally, though English readers might know little about Italian laws of inheritance, they would be aware that Calini’s status as a foundling negated, at least according to English law, any claim that he might have on his adoptive father’s estate, causing it to pass instead to a nephew or distant cousin. The elder Calini’s desire to maintain his adopted son’s secret past would not have been surprising under such circumstances.

These pieces of information are crucial to understanding foreign perception by English readers. While tales such as “The Vindictive Monk” were set in far-away, exotic lands in order to promote their sensationalism, characters’ behavior and motivations often appeared as distinctly English in order to further the understanding and sympathy of English chapbook readers.

The fact that this particular story occurs in a staunchly Catholic nation, however, is deeply expressive of one more long-held hindrance to formal adoption in Europe, and England in particular. Aside from the laws of primogeniture, another reason that adoption was not legalized earlier than 1926 was the solid influence of the Church – first Catholic, but later strictly Protestant. Focused on governing England through a moral code than included mandatory church membership and participation, as well as the enforcement of good behavior based on Biblical principles, the idea that unwanted children could be legally disposed of seemed an endorsement of the immorality of extra-marital affairs. As Benet notes, bearing an illegitimate child actually became a criminal offense under English poor laws; a woman could not surrender her child to surrogate state care without submitting to that governmental care (the poorhouse) herself. Poor, deformed, or unwanted children were thus seen as a national problem to be dealt with, often through sending children to the colonies or apprenticing them out as servants for unsavory jobs, rather than as fodder for childless families of all ranks throughout the country who desperately sought a son or daughter of their own. The type of “care” that kept such children alive also solidified their lowly and completely bleak position for life. To prevent such a hopeless fate, “[d]e facto adoption was known throughout this period, and this met with the
consent of the Poor Law Guardians, if not exactly with their approval: ‘English officials found it
difficult to believe that there could be any relationship unless money was being paid for the
child’s keep’” (Benet 59). Such a nationally held belief maintained that it was impossible for a
family to be deeply attached to a child that bore no shared heredity, and thus saw no reason for
the establishment of adoption laws founded in Christian charity. Though this type of adoption
took the care of an unwanted child from the state, it did not mean that the child that was taken in
could enjoy the same legal rights as a biological child based upon beliefs that were at the same
time religious and political. Though England was not Catholic at the time of “The Vindictive
Monk’s” publication, the recognition of deeply embedded Christian values about the stain of
illegitimacy would not be difficult for English readers.

Though Calini is adopted, however, the English author Crookenden does not hesitate to
pursue one question that would have been at the forefront in the minds of his English readers,
namely, blood. In a society that placed much greater emphasis on heredity than environment,
adoption could be considered dangerous; one did not know what sort of person was being taken
into the family. Patricia Morgan’s discussion of blood in Adoption and the Care of Children:
The British and American Experience (1998) explains that reliance upon a standard of
aristocratic breeding for class structure was threatened by the concept of an uncertain heritage.
An adopted child could possess genes that might lead to immorality, insanity, or rage, regardless
of the quality of surrogate parents involved. Specifically, the blemish of bastardy was believed
to lead directly to a continuation of such behavior. Under these circumstances, the unquestioned
adoption of Calini by his surrogate father may have appeared foolish or uncommon. It would be
easy to argue that Calini’s story proves such theories wrong; he is well loved and respected in his
community and is described as an example of “mental perfection” (51). However, even after his
foundling status is revealed, the author takes steps to prove that his bloodlines are still
commendable enough to make him worthy of the fine Italian father that took him in. Sceloni’s
story of his history reveals that (despite his indisputable cruelty) he was raised in a wealthy,
indulgent family and that he had married a sweet and admirable woman (Calini’s mother) before
turning to a despicable life serving as a murderer-for-hire. The combined effects of aristocratic
bloodlines, a venerable mother, and the care of a loving surrogate father make Calini a prime
example of England’s obsession with a strong heritage. He has every right to the claim of the
noble hero.
That English readers would place the understanding of kinship as an object of prime importance is seen even in these stories that focus on an adopted child rather than a wealthy or landed biological heir. Consistently, the discovery or communication of true parentage is critical to the completion of a story’s action. “The Vindictive Monk” also devotes attention to Alexa, for example; she is of good parents who left her aunt a slender income with which to support her after their deaths, yet blood accounts for her beauty and delicacy despite her poverty. “The Poisoner of Montremos” revolves around Don Juan’s discovery that the man who has raised him is not his true father, and that his biological father is wealthy beyond measure. The orphaned Constance of “The Mysterious Novice” is unable to leave her convent and marry the man of her choosing until it is brought to the audience’s attention that the marquis who raised her and willed her presence in the convent is in fact her grandfather and not her father. In all cases, the questions of blood and heredity are crucial both to the story’s action and the audience’s understanding and acceptance of the hero or heroine.

This theory of adoption that focused so thoroughly on the child’s biological heredity was, of course, much older than the more universally accepted “clean slate theory” of the twenty-first century. This theory relies on a child’s new beginnings with a new set of parents, regardless of the past behavior or characteristics of his family. However, such a theory has also long been associated with the aptly named “clean break” approach that, though a modern theoretical practice, is strikingly emblematic of the actual treatment of adopted children by their new families in two hundred year old gothic short fiction.

The “clean break” approach, as Penelope Welbourne notes in the essay “Attachment Theory and Children’s Rights,” is based upon the idea that children form the strongest attachments in youth. Therefore, this adoption practice revolves around placing only very young children with parents (usually by or before the child reaches the age of two) and thereafter never resuming contact with the birth parents. “The supporting theory was that severing the child’s early, possibly damaging attachment to the biological parent/s would free the child to develop a new, healthier attachment in the new family” (66). Though modern critical essays on adoption argue the validity of this theory, its practice appears uniform across the spectrum of gothic short fiction involving surrogate paternity in this study. The children Calini in “The Vindictive Monk” and Don Juan in “The Poisoner of Montremos” are adopted as infants, raised in the belief that they are biological members of the family they have entered. Constance of “The Mysterious Novice”
is separated from her parents at an early age and set up as heiress to her grandfather’s wealth instead.

The successful completion of the “clean break” approach relies upon the absolute removal of a child from all contact with birth parents, and often upon not even informing the child of their existence. Constance is a character who proves emblematic of the trauma that this could feasibly cause a child in such a situation. “The Mysterious Novice” tells the intricate story of Constance, a beautiful young woman in a nunnery against her will. Her mother Vitoria, the daughter of the Marquis Sperreth by his first wife, elopes with a Protestant and is thus disowned by her wealthy Catholic father. When her husband is killed at war, however, Vitoria begs that her father take herself and Constance in. The marquis promises that Constance will be an heiress under his own name (he is planning her marriage to Adolphus, his grandson by his second marriage) if Vitoria will relinquish all rights to her and enter a nunnery. Vitoria does so, but it is only a matter of time before the marquis is led to believe by a corrupt priest that Constance is squandering his money and is also forced to enter the same nunnery, which is where Adolphus finds her many years later.

Constance’s trauma throughout the story is extensive. Though as a child she might have shadowy memories of a doting biological father, every attempt at erasing them by her grandfather would only lead to further uncertainty about her past. The presence of a surrogate father who later turns out to be tyrannical in his behavior toward her prevents her from being able to completely trust anyone who is meant to give her care (later, this even includes Adolphus). The mock funeral that the marquis holds for Vitoria after she is banished convinces Constance that her biological mother (the daughter of the man she thinks is her father, also opening up connotations of incest) is dead. However, when Constance enters the convent, she discovers the contrary when the Madre turns out to be Vitoria herself. Convent life, meant to focus on solitude and devotion to Christ, thus also becomes for Vitoria an opportunity to regain her lost heritage as she grows closer to the woman who is both her physical and spiritual mother. After Vitoria’s death, Constance’s abuse by Josephine, the new Madre, proceeds to then remove the faith she has built in the support of the Catholic Church. The later appearance of her cousin – and betrothed – Adolphus proceeds to shake her intent to take the vows as a nun, rocking her personal place in the Church and likely the only remaining center of her being. What form of identity might Constance hope to retain? Her tempestuous life of adoption and abandonment
means that she has been traded and kept like a piece of property by an assortment of parents, surrogate and biological, who express little or no concern for her rights or well-being.

Constance’s sorrowful life depends very much on the whims of others; despite the shocking nature of her treatment, the possibility of the abuse of an adopted child was yet another problem with the lack of English adoption laws. If a surrogate parent could obtain no legal right to a child, the reverse meant that there was also no legal determination of how a child should be treated. Thus, according to Morgan and Benet, a child could ostensibly be raised in the home but with no more rights than a servant, and no more permanency if a parent tired of his or her behavior. Notes Morgan, “many of the general public [saw] adoption as an unsavoury if not dangerous development, with overtones of babyfarming, cruel step-parents, and foster parents on the one hand, and bastardy, “bad blood”, and a threat to decent family life on the other” (41). Such philosophies also justified the state’s idea that attachments formed without any monetary commitment could not be seen as permanent or meaningful. Sad as Constance’s tale is, no one but the mother who has been banished from her life has any legal claim or responsibility for her happiness or care under English law.

As a woman, Constance has few rights in the first place; as an adopted child, those are reduced to nothing. She has no claim on a name or inheritance, and thus no money for maintaining a life of freedom apart from a husband or father. Upon entering the convent, she has no authority in the church, and no choice but to begin the process of taking the veil under the command of the abusive Madre Josephine. Even after her rescue by Adolphus, she has no legal recourse but to marry him if she hopes to avoid a life of poverty and solitude. The problem of Constance’s personhood begins in her infancy and haunts her throughout her existence; the stain of her adoption prohibits any semblance of a normal life.

In light of the rights of an adopted child, even modern adoption laws question the problem of identity. In following the “clean break” approach, adoption is, according to Welbourne, “a lawful deprivation of identity” (65). Though, ostensibly, assigning a child to the possession of new parents against her will (or, at least, without her consent) is for her own good, it attempts the full erasure of something that English readers would have considered an enormous indicator of her behavior and rights by denying the question of blood and heredity. Constance again serves as proof of what this loss of identity can do to a youth. She has been under the control of others her entire life, ending with the minutely managed atmosphere of the convent where the vengeful
Madre who takes control after Vitoria’s death locks her in a cellar and tries to force her to take the veil. She has no biological father, no adoptive father, and the surrogate control she fled to next – the Church – has also failed her. She has no legal recourse and no hope for finding herself; those who treated her as an object to be disposed of her entire life have failed her miserably.

The alternative to the obviously tainted “clean break approach” is a later theory – based upon research conducted since 1975 – that proves that adopted children function more normally and live much more happily within an adopted family structure if they are made aware of their origins. Research now demonstrates to surrogate parents that “[g]ood communication is critical if children are to grow up with a strong sense of identity, and a clear sense of who they are” (Feast 139). Dwelling on the realization that children, even young and even adopted, are citizens with specifically defined rights, candidness about adoption or fostering allows a child to come to terms with both the parents that he does not have and the parents that he does and build a strong sense of trust and appreciation for his caregivers.

In eighteenth century England, however, this approach would be unthinkable because an adopted child could likely not hope for any knowledge of his heritage. “Notions of a ‘complete transplant’, together with the effort which went into confidentiality and helping the adoptive parents ‘pass off’ the child as their own, testify to the continual unease surrounding adoption” (Morgan 41). Again, in a society so immersed in patriarchy, blood, and strict morality, to risk a child’s revelation of his history to someone who might be able to damage the family’s tenuous structure meant that a father could not venture to allow his adopted son to know the truth of his heritage, at least not at a young and vulnerable age when he lacked understanding of the importance of concealment.

Again, “The Vindictive Monk” proves a model of the protocol behind English adoption. While Calini’s father does eventually tell the young man of his foundling status, it is not until Calini is old enough to be of marriageable and inheritable age. Calini’s response is, of course, one of “astonishment” (51), as every understanding he has had of his parentage thus far has been proven wrong. However, Calini’s actions after learning this intelligence are also quite noteworthy. He muses on the story of his past, assures his father of his enduring love, and then seems to put the knowledge behind him. He does not share the confidence with friends, or even with his betrothed, Alexa. In short, Calini is well aware of the secrecy that must still surround
his birth if he is to maintain the status of landed heir and also retain the “delight and admiration […] of every body who knew him” (51) that defined his place in polite society. Though not necessarily following the requirements of Italian laws of inheritance, his behavior is such that English readers would not question why he did not share this new knowledge. Calini has been so thoroughly imbued with not only a belief in his family structure but an understanding of how that surrogate family must be handled in order to maintain a delicate balance of lineage that he is not allowed the time or energy to be concerned with his biological ancestry.

“The Poisoner of Montremos,” however, demonstrates what might happen at the opposite end of the spectrum, when the adopted child is made aware of his status and acts upon it without taking English social restrictions into account. Though Don Juan has been raised as part of a rich Lisbon family and was under the belief for most of his life that he was the man’s natural son, he is informed at the death of the biological father that he never knew (a wealthy trader in Brazil) that he is adopted. With this knowledge, Don Juan recognizes that Josepha, the woman he has always regarded as a sister, is no relation, and they begin a clandestine courtship that leads to her extramarital pregnancy. There are whispers of incest in town, and glances of disapproval toward the man that the Spaniards still regard as her brother. When Josepha is poisoned, Don Juan is put on trial both for incest and murder. At threat of his life (not before, as that might both strain the relationship with his adopted father and endanger his hard-to-explain but vast inheritance) he admits to being adopted and thus to being innocent of the first crime, but refuses to confess to the second, as his adopted father – the man Don Juan has spent his entire life respecting and loving – is himself the culprit. Don Juan is tortured to death on the rack, his last attempts at secrecy and respect for patriarchy the result of a lifetime of loyalty to a surrogate father who betrayed him and conformity to a persona that he discovers too late is not his own. Again, English readers would have deeply understood Don Juan’s plight: the clandestine affair with the woman he loved could either cost his life or his inheritance, but had certainly already cost him his honor.

Theoretically, then, discussion of true biological heritage is crucial to the complete social and mental development of an adopted child. However, without question, English society of the eighteenth century (especially those branches which involved transmission of land or titles) was not at all conducive to that sort of openness. Though the theories and research that founded such belief were not carried out until two hundred years later, the fictional performances of the characters in these stories are surprisingly true to life as they struggle with problems of identity.
In this sense, the portrayal of adoption might be the single characteristic of gothic chapbooks that could be called realistic. Amidst stories of intrigue, corruption, cruelty, and the supernatural, this oft-concealed aspect of English society appears as a surprisingly accurate portrayal of eighteenth century patriarchy.
CHAPTER 3

CATHOLIC PATERNITY

Yet another portrayal of paternity in eighteenth-century gothic short fiction appears in stories that deal with the Catholic priesthood. Though neither officially a biological or adopted father, a priest did hold unique sway over his parishioners in the form of spiritual leader, confessor, and role model. The priest would have many opportunities to demonstrate the purity and good purpose of the Catholic Church and to lead his flock along a path of obedience and justice. However, the standard in gothic short fiction by English authors in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries consistently portrayed these fathers as corrupt, cruel, and self-centered, aligning them with the stereotypical views of Catholicism that the English had held for decades. Such portrayals were not limited to priests, however; one noticeable factor of gothic short fiction is the absence of redemption in Catholics of all varieties. Women such as nuns and abbesses, culturally meant to be Church mother figures, are placed in positions of absolute and corruptible power just as men are, making them as loathsome as men and aligning their personalities very closely with those of Catholic fathers.

Here, I use short fiction that includes “The Ruins of the Abbey of Fitz-Martin,” “The Friar’s Tale,” and “The Poisoner of Montremos” to demonstrate the intense English suspicion of the Catholic Church. The appearance of powerful and corrupt priests and monks in these stories by Protestant authors solidly demonstrates both a fear of Catholics and Catholic beliefs as well as a sense of English social and political superiority. However, I also argue that the appearance of women in these texts – nuns, abbesses, and madres, for example – also demonstrate another facet of English beliefs about Catholicism. Essentially, the women behave in the same atrocious and self-seeking ways that the men do, negating English belief in the positive influence of femininity in regards to the “family” of the Catholic Church. Thus, the Catholic Church appears as both completely evil and completely masculine.

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Susan M. Griffin notes in “Revising the Popish Plot: Frances Trollope’s *The Abbess* and *Father Eustace*” (2003) that “the touchstones of English anti-Catholicism [were] the corrupt and corrupting confessional, the selling of indulgences, and the idolatry of praying for and to the dead” (286). Such emblems of Catholicism were deeply foreign to a form of Protestantism that was in the late 18th century far-removed from the high-church Anglicanism of Henry VIII. To the Protestant reader, portrayals of the Catholic Church and its members were enough to evoke terror and continue the trend of distrust against countries that practiced it.

Despite this time period’s deep suspicion of Catholics, England had not itself been a Protestant nation for long by 1800. After the mayhem of religious persecution and preference generated by the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Mary I, rule by Elizabeth I and her successor James I directed the country toward Protestantism. Later turmoil during Oliver Cromwell’s years as Lord Protector even more strictly enforced Protestantism in England, and attempted to impress Puritanism, rather than high-church Protestantism. The rule of James II saw an attempt to restore Catholicism to England, but he was forced to flee to France by Parliament. The 1689 Bill of Rights passed during the reign of William III and Mary II declared that no Catholic could henceforth sit on the throne of England. A later attempt to restore Catholicism to England came when James Stuart, son of James II, landed in Scotland during the rule of George I, but was quickly defeated and returned to France. His son, Charles Stuart, also attempted a rebellion begun in Scotland in 1745 but failed.

By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Catholicism was a highly debated issue in England. Catholics were belittled and denied rights, existing as second-class citizens in the time of this gothic fiction. In 1829, the Catholic Emancipation Act was passed and, at least officially, England was no longer anti-Catholic. However, the reality of the situation was an intense religious struggle that lasted for decades, brought to the forefront in shilling shocker fiction.

Such a history of religious and political turmoil meant that writers in the late 1700s and early 1800s had it in their best interests to portray to their English readers their own homeland in the most attractive way possible by contrasting it with darker times and places. Thus, the tactic of utilizing English mistrust of other countries (predominantly Catholic) was common in such gothic tales. Sympathizers with Catholic France’s Revolution – the Jacobins – were viewed with suspicion, as was the entire country of France, with whom the English were at war off and on
from 1688-1788. Staunchly Catholic Italy, Spain, and Portugal were old nemeses in battles for land and exploration. Nearly without exception, the gothic short fiction that portrays Catholics as a whole as bloodthirsty and corrupt places such people in countries that the English mistrusted anyway: “The Poisoner of Montremos” is set in Portugal, “The Friar’s Tale” and “The Parricide Punished” in France, and “The Vindictive Monk” in Italy. The single exception included in this study, “The Ruins of the Abbey of Fitz-Martin” is set in England during the reign of Edward I (1272-1307), a time so removed from the readers of 1801 that there was no conflict in considering the citizens of so many hundreds of years ago corrupted by what they then considered a false religion.

Central to Protestant suspicion of Catholicism was the absolute power with which father figures in the Catholic Church were endowed. Numerous accounts of the confessional being used as a locale for the corruption of innocence and the theft of riches appear throughout gothic short fiction. One old pattern, as Griffin points out in “Revising the Popish Plot,” was the rape or seduction of a virginal young heiress by a Catholic figure of leadership, her confinement in a convent as punishment, and the transfer of her fortune to the Church (286). Additionally, Catholicism’s reliance upon the pope and lower earthly figures as representatives of God’s authority were, in the Protestant eye, but an opportunity for training in absolute obedience without question, thus allowing for the imprisonment in convents of “faithful” daughters and the continuous corruption of generations of young monks and priests as they bent their wills to their Church superiors. Finally, the Church was a sort of rule unto itself, with a political hierarchy based out of Rome, which, in theory, held sway over the rulers and authorities of much of Europe. This sets up the reality that Catholic “fathers” had to answer to no one (at least, no one outside the Church) for their behavior and that the plight of the “children” under their influence was certainly desperate and hopeless.

Such fear and suspicion was dutifully portrayed by Protestant authors in their short fiction. Corrupt Catholic fathers are the rule, and finding a kindly friar or two in some of the narratives is a much more surprising occurrence. One prime example is that of the coldly unsympathetic abbot in “The Ruins of the Abbey of Fitz-Martin.” While young Anna’s father is away at court, she secretly falls in love with and marries an unknown gentleman and becomes pregnant. When her father returns with orders that she marry the man of his choosing she flees to a convent to await her mysterious husband. The abbot, upon discovering her pregnancy, is
certain that she has broken the vows of the convent and sentences her to death despite her heartrending pleas. He gazes on her with “an increasing look of penetrating sternness” before sentencing her to “[d]eath the most horrible and excruciating” (47). Anna is locked without food or water into a cell adorned with images of death and abandoned by the men positioned to be her earthly fathers; she bears her child and dies with three chilling cries, returning later to haunt her murderers. In “The Vindictive Monk,” a corrupt Catholic is actually induced to criminal acts for financial gain. The monk Sceloni is hired as a hit man and a kidnapper, confining the rich young Calini to a dungeon and carrying Calini’s betrothed, Alexa, to his enemy Holbruзи’s castle. In both cases, the story’s author proves eager to portray all members of the Catholic faith as negatively as possible, beginning with the corrupt men in positions of power.

In my discussions of fatherhood and the consistent abuses by biological fathers of their children, one recurring theme should be noted: none of the fathers examined in this study have the benefit of a female counterpart to serve as a mother figure for the children that they are thus left to raise alone. Mothers, cruel or otherwise, are significantly absent in gothic short stories, excepting “The Poisoner of Montremos” where the villain’s hesitant wife is described as “unhappy” (10) and it is said that “[s]he revolted from the idea [of murder] in horror” (11). This example but strengthens the argument that women are consistently portrayed as a redeeming influence on the lives of the men around them, balancing the propensity for tyranny evidenced by the father with gentleness and love – evidently a precursor to the Victorian ideal of the “angel in the house.” Without that inspiration to good, however, the role of the father consistently turns abusive and manipulative.

This and other qualities of the gothic short story are evident when examining the portrayal of the Catholic Church in English fiction of the day. One especially crucial item of note is Catholicism’s redefinition of the family structure. While God is the spiritual Father, priests fall into a position of fatherhood on earth. Additionally, while the Virgin is known as “Holy Mary, mother of God,” her earthly female counterparts are authorities such as the mother superior or abbess. Monks and nuns embody holy brothers and sisters in the faith, thus creating a strict familial model within the confines of the Catholic faith and inside the walls of gothic monasteries and convents. Beyond this structure, however, is the understanding that the Catholic Church is based upon masculinity; at its peak is the pope, the Holy Father to whom all must
answer, meaning that regardless of the behavior of its subordinate members, Catholic rule depends on masculinity.

Protestant authors portraying the Catholic faith would have been eager to dismiss these “heresies.” Contrary to the Catholic trend of placing Mary in a position of admiration and supplication, Protestant doctrine forbids such a near-deification of any person but God Himself. Additionally, the thought of a mediator between Christ and man – the role served by the priest – is a direct contrast to the Protestant model of salvation that requires no such intermediary. Finally, Protestantism leaves no place for the guidance of the pope, believing that there is no authority on earth that begins to compare with the authority of God and thus that the Holy Father has no more sway in the mind of God or man than the average citizen. With this in mind, it is not surprising to note that English authors either ignored or twisted the place of monks, priests, and their female counterparts in such short stories as “The Friar’s Tale.”

In this sensational story, published anonymously in three installments of The Lady’s Magazine in 1792, a Protestant narrator relates a story of traveling through the French Alps and encountering a kindly reverend father at a secluded monastery. This friar proceeds to entertain the traveler with a tale from his early days at the monastery that contains several conventional aspects of gothic fiction in the late-eighteenth century tradition. Matilda, a beautiful young heiress, falls in love with Albert, a poor but admirable man in her village, much to her father’s chagrin. He banishes her to a convent and bestows all his wealth upon her cousin Conrad, leaving Albert to flee from Conrad’s wrath and take shelter at the already-mentioned monastery. While at the convent, Matilda is verbally and emotionally abused by Sister Theresa, the abbess, driving her to the point of madness and leading her to escape from the convent. Albert seeks Matilda at the convent, where he attempts to kill Conrad. After a series of twists and turns in the tale, Matilda and Albert are reunited and married.

Although the story contains evidence of a biological father’s tyranny toward his only daughter, I reserve that trend for another chapter. Specifically, Matilda’s fate is tragically directed by Catholics who have absolute control of her life inside the convent. In lieu of her biological father, the male Church figures in the tale are given power to determine who Matilda may love, where she may go, and even how she is permitted to think. Such priests appear constantly in the gothic short fiction examined in this study, but they do not make up the entire family structure of Catholicism. Of special interest in this particular short story is the behavior
of those members of the Catholic faith who should have performed the role of a mother, thus providing a protective barrier between the helpless and the reverend fathers who abuse them.

Essentially, Catholics offer two mother figures that can potentially be accepted as female role models and caretakers to balance the family structure of the Catholic Church. However, Protestants are eager to renounce them both: the Virgin Mary is ineligible for the place of a mother because she does not exist as a deity at all in the Protestant eye. She has no power in heaven or on earth, no place in a salvation experience or pious life, and is unworthy of any note beyond the story of Christ’s birth. Thus, to Protestants, her earthly counterparts – the abbesses and nuns who theoretically should complement priests and monks – have no role model of their own and cannot behave with the kindness and love that a “real” mother should. Although the Catholic faith would be quick to acknowledge these women as the redeeming influence on a priest’s potential corruption, Protestant writers deny them that ability, and the priests are permitted to rampage throughout the pages of gothic fiction with no feminine check.

The women of the Catholic Church are as thoroughly lambasted as the men, with the result being an assumption that there is no redemption in either sex; the women are made to possess the gothic masculine traits of abuse and tyranny, and their sex vanishes as they become a loathsome part of the hated masculine Church that Protestants delighted in further exploiting. Griffin goes so far as to say that “[l]ike the lascivious priest who commands through the confessional, the Abbess or Mother Superior appears in anti-Catholic literature and pornography as an image for uncontrolled, sexualized authority. Her unchecked female power is portrayed as irrational, sudden, and violent” (“Revising” 281). The behavior of the abbess in this short story is an ideal example of such a definition of Church authority.

In “The Friar’s Tale”, Matilda has many chances to be abused by those who should be her protectors, among them Sister Theresa. Taking the role of the head of the convent where Matilda is held, Sister Theresa has the absolute power of a father over her unwilling charge, and like a gothic father she goes to work tormenting Matilda. She “used severities of conventional discipline, which almost deprived the devoted victim of her reason; still pleading that religion justified her conduct” (14). Abandoned by her father and subjected to the cruelty of a father-like “mother,” Matilda has little choice but to denounce her faith, to the delight of the Protestant storyteller, as she flees the convent, marries Albert, and refuses the company of anyone clothed in priestly garb. Additionally, Sister Theresa appears as an emblem of the suppressed sexuality
of Catholicism. Near the tale’s end, Matilda sees Sister Theresa and Conrad embracing in a doorway and plotting her murder. According to the author of the story, it is uncertain which of the crimes – adultery or attempted murder – is worse. Regardless, Sister Theresa has served the purpose of fulfilling Protestant expectations of corruption, and is conveniently disposed of by the last pages with a very telling death: “Theresa had too far profaned the laws of heaven to have any confidence in religion, and died by her own hands” (21).

Although the kindly friar who tells the frame story is quick to point out that Sister Theresa was a “disgrace of her profession, and our holy church, disguising the disposition of the devil in the garment of a saint” (13), his defense of women in power does not align with their portrayal by consistently Protestant authors. The abbess in “The Ruins of the Abbey of Fitz-Martin,” for example, fails to be Anna’s last defense from a tyrannical biological father and the vindictive spiritual fathers of the abbey. She pressures and threatens the secretly married and pregnant Anna to become a nun despite the girl’s fear, and after discovering Anna’s state, listens coldly to her pleas and spreads the word of Anna’s “sin” to the fathers who proceed to sentence her to her death. The abbess is one more conventional gothic character, one more unfeeling member of the male Church, one more fatherly authority figure in Anna’s life who refused to take filial responsibility for the young woman.

Since the instances of Catholic women having a chance to perform a motherly role is rare, it is important to note that their failure to do so is consistent. To English readers, the Catholic Church and all its members were tyrannical and power-hungry, traits more generally assigned to despised fathers than institutions of love and support. The absolute dismissal of Catholicism as possessing redemptive and healthy family traits makes the character of the oppressive priest nearly expected. If the females who appear have none of the gentleness and instinctive care that readers would expect from a mother, then ultimately no such concern and nurturing can come from the male sex either; abuse by Catholic fathers thus continues as a traditional element of eighteenth century short fiction.

Interestingly, though fathers both adoptive and biological have their moments of abusiveness and malice, Catholic fathers seem unable to leave it. Even when Catholic cruelty is paired with or results from another father’s inaction or unkindness, that father is quite often eligible for a change of heart, while priests seem consistently fated to remain as examples of hellish brutality. Take, for example, “The Poisoner of Montremos” (1791) by Richard
Cumberland. In this tale, Don Juan is accused of the murder of his adopted sister and fiancé Josepha; the apparent heartache resulting from the murder has also caused his adopted mother to die of grief and his adopted father to retreat into a monastery, leaving his fortune to Don Juan. Don Juan is brought before a Catholic court of inquisition, which resorts to torture on the rack when he refuses to acknowledge who poisoned Josepha. At the story’s end, a monk (Don Juan’s adopted father) rushes into the proceedings and confesses to the crime of poisoning his daughter while attempting to poison Don Juan, his adopted son, in order to obtain his wealthy family’s fortune. Before the torture can be stopped, however, Don Juan dies of his wounds and the father kills himself, cursing the church that allowed such torment.

While Josepha’s father has admitted to a ghastly crime – attempted murder of his adopted son, murder of his only daughter, and the resulting death of his wife – he can claim justification in his turn of conscience and his confession. He calls himself “the vilest criminal”, yet seems convinced that his confession might have soothed the anger of God against him. However, the court torturers have no such opportunity or right to redeem themselves before God; they are, in the eyes of the confessed poisoner, wretched and damned:

“The monk had fixed his eyes upon him [Don Juan], ghastly with horror, as he stretched out his mangled limbs at life’s last gasp. ‘Accursed monsters, (he exclaimed) may God requite his murder on your souls at the great day of judgment! His blood be on your heads ye ministers of darkness! For me, if heavenly vengeance is not yet appeased by my contrition, in the midst of flames my aggrieved soul will find some consolation in the thought, that you partake of its torments” (11).

He then proceeds to commit suicide, invoking the reader’s knowledge that a Catholic would thus consider him damned despite his spirited confession and curse. However, the action is distinctly Protestant in that the guilty father has hope of forgiveness and salvation directly from God and not through a confessor.

Similarly, Matilda of “The Friar’s Tale” is pardoned from the convent by her dying father, but he expresses his reprieve only to her and her greedy cousin Conrad, leaving her helpless to Conrad and Sister Theresa’s plot to keep her confined. Thus the crimes of Catholicism continue against her while her father has attempted – however late – to offer the

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5 According to Chris Baldick, this short story was renamed from the original title, simply called “Remarkable Narrative” in its first publication in *The Lady’s Magazine*. 

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love and protection she so desired. As the author puts it, “his heart condemned him” (13). Though he does not seek out a priest for confession, he calls to heaven for forgiveness and asks it of his wronged daughter as well as he cries, “Forgive thy father! – Destroy this paper [his will that condemned her to the convent], and be happy; so be my sins forgiven in heaven!” (13). Essentially, both Matilda’s father and the guilty father of Josepha have been struck by an attack of conscience – something that Victor Sage portrays as conspicuously un-Catholic.

Sage expresses a distinct difference between the Catholic and Protestant ideas of guilt and confession in his book *Horror Fiction in the Protestant Tradition*. Catholics, he says, externalize conscience, and thus have need of a confessor. They do not experience a tug of an internal need of absolution, but base their forgiveness of sin on acts such as prayer. Protestants, on the other hand, deal with an internalized conscience that relies upon guilt and a personal communication with God to be forgiven. According to Griffin, Protestants are led by what she calls the “creed of individual conscience and English independent thought” (“Revising” 282). This combination of Protestantism and Englishness is crucial to understanding the roles of forgiveness and guilt in short fiction that includes Catholic figures set in other countries. The double suspicion of religion and nationality meant an even greater horror on the part of the English Protestant reader at ghastly behavior by fathers meant to be in positions of protection.

With this problem of internal and external conscience in mind, the roles of the supposedly Catholic biological fathers in these two examples are troubling. Both Josepha’s father and Matilda’s father evince in their dying guilt and confession the internal shame of a crime and the ability to be reconciled to God and those around them without aid of a confessor before their deaths. In this sense, they are behaving as Protestants, and thus, to both Protestant authors and their readers, are eligible for forgiveness and redemption. Relying on the belief that God forgives any sin when asked, such characters are pardoned and blessed even without the ritual of confession or the intercession of a priest. In the end, they have at least attempted to reconcile themselves to their children and their own Father in heaven (God). Their behavior is not believable if they are viewed as Catholics, but to accept them as incarnations of Protestant values in times and places where such influence would not be expected is to suspend disbelief for the sake of entertainment and a quick moral.

The Catholic behavior of the members of the Church, however, is doubly terrifying and horrendous to such Protestant audiences because the performers of such vile deeds as torture and
the confinement of a young woman can never receive pardon for their sins. Their current lifestyle of cruelty would damn them without confession, and because confession is an empty ritual, they have no ability to confess; therefore, the characters portrayed are distinctly gruesome and monstrous; they are walking dead, possessed by evil and under the eternal control of Satan.

That authors specifically portrayed Catholic fathers at home and abroad as the Other in order to directly complement the suspicion and fear of the English Protestant reading public is undeniable. However, there is a sufficient appearance of “good” priests and monks that often the motivation and sympathy of the author might fall into question. For example, “The Friar’s Tale” is framed by a Protestant listening intently to a story told by an elderly friar at a remote mountain monastery. The friar’s life is one of care and loving aid; he maintains the monastery with dogs that rescue lost travelers, and offers asylum to Albert when he flees from Conrad. He is also quick to defend Matilda when she denounces Catholicism in the face of her abuse by Sister Theresa, instead of condemning her apparent blasphemy. Clearly, this priest is more of an example of what Catholicism is meant to embody than any of the other Church leaders in the story. Even so, the friar is not completely without blame. He is still under the control of the Church hierarchy, and believes in its politics. After Matilda escapes her convent and seeks shelter near the monastery, the friar is under direct obligation to send her back and is taking steps to do so when news arrives that Matilda is released from her prison. In addition, when Albert unleashes a rant against the Church upon hearing this news, the father reprimands him severely. His model behavior is that of unquestioning obedience, and he expresses with indignation his own complete subservience to and undying respect for the Church to which he has surrendered his life.

“My son, blame not the pious institutions of our holy church, sanctified by the observance of many ages; nor impiously arraign the mysterious decrees of providence, which often produces good from evil. This sacred edifice has been consecrated like many others by our pious ancestors, for purposes honourable to heaven and useful to mankind; these hospital doors are ever open to distress; and the chief object of our care is to discover and relieve it. This holy mansion has long been an asylum against the oppression of human laws, which drove thee from thine home; and, but a few days since thou thyself blessed an institution which saved the wretched Matilda, perishing with madness. Nay, at this very moment, its mercy shelters from the hand of justice, a
murderer! yet thy presumption dares to deny its 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” (20).

It is beyond the scope of even the kindly friar’s imagination that anyone might disapprove of the severe ways of Catholicism. Even as the tale closes, the Protestant narrator mentions that the old priest “briefly hinted arguments in favor of monastic institutions” (21). The narrator says that the priest allowed “that the religion of his country might in certain points be wrong” (21), yet refuses to express what those points are, claiming the fictitious priest’s privacy as his reason. Apparently, the author is only sympathetic to the brand of Catholicism that is prepared to admit its shortcomings, something that this friar has tried to do but whose actions demonstrate his propensity to behave otherwise.

Other examples of a gently accepted Catholicism are more comical. The hero Calini of “The Vindictive Monk” is described thus:

Although Calini was reared up in the principles of the Romish church, that did not hinder him from seeing some of its absurdities; and therefore, while some of the votaries placed the essence of their religion in a gaudy exhibition of pompous ceremonies, his consisted in a steady, uniform system of good actions; an undeviating rectitude of conduct, prompted by the motive of his present and everlasting interest, as well as by the intrinsic beauty of benevolence (51).

The author of this short story, Isaac Crookenden, must separate his champion from the bulk of Catholics in order to have him be loved and accepted by Protestant readers; however, the necessity of the occurrence of darkly gothic elements such as a mouldering castle with a dark dungeon and the kidnapping and attempted rape of a young virgin require that the tale be set in a Catholic country just the same. Even with Calini’s justification as “a pretty good guy,” however, Protestant readers would be quick to note that his definition of acceptable religion is still decidedly Catholic in its focus on works. Evidently, it is still in the best interest of the writer to make Calini a foreign curiosity, much like the author of “The Friar’s Tale” does with the kindly old priest.
Sage notes that the gothic tradition relies upon Freud’s ideas of the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich*, which he interprets as the “homely” and “unhomely.” For the reader to understand the *unheimlich*, he must have a sense of the *heimlich* against which to compare it. This sums up the strategy of setting up the antagonists of gothic tales as members of a mysterious religion and people of a far-off place. English readers would perceive Catholics as direct opposites of themselves as members of the Protestant faith; they would see Italian, French, and Portuguese citizens as foils to the rationality and modernity of their own land. The darkness and suspicion of such a setup makes the horror of an “unhomely” father even more distinct. Despite the unfamiliar backdrop of the religious and political unknown, the figure of the father is meant to be universally loving and protective; gothic authors rob their readers of this certainty with their shocking portrayals of corrupt and evil Catholic priests. Therefore, the Catholic fathers in these stories provide an even greater sense of horror for their readers than those fathers who occasionally trespass against their biological children, at once dismantling the security of land, home, church, and family with their monstrous actions. Thus the tradition of unflattering portrayals of Catholic “paternity” not only meant increased sales for the writers and publishers of gothic fiction; it also further helped maintain national pride and Protestant political power.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lauren Murphey was born in 1982 in Fort Walton Beach, Florida. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of South Alabama and a Master of Arts in English Literature from Florida State University. She specializes in the areas of British Victorian and Romantic literature.