

Hauntings in the Church:
Counterfeit Christianity through the *Fin de Siècle* Gothic Novel

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Abstract

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The lengthy Victorian period, extending from 1832 until 1901, was a time of cultural turmoil. New scientific discoveries were being made daily, and Christianity was forced to deal with issues of Darwinism, occultism, and growing disbelief in God. By the start of the *fin de siècle*, God was an impartial deity sitting on His almighty throne, and man was nothing more than a highly evolved animal. The church, both Catholic and Anglican, did not exist to lead man toward salvation, but existed because of a dated adherence to cultural tradition.

No one genre captured the religious upheavals of the age better than did the Gothic novel. With its intrinsic fascination with the supernatural and the unexplained, the Gothic novel proved to be an excellent platform for authors to air their beliefs about rising spiritualism, Catholicism, and aestheticism in a predominantly Anglican country. Through the analysis of Marie Corelli's *Vendetta!*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, three of the most popular novels of the *fin de siècle*, a better picture of the religious opinions of England's literary elite can be drawn, along with suppositions about the popularity of such novels in a faith-starved culture.

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DEDICATIONS

With love, to my wonderful husband—who suffered through countless nights of frozen burritos for dinner so that I could write “just one more sentence.”

Many thanks to all the members of my thesis committee, especially Dr. Ayres—for their constant support and direction while I was writing and revising my thesis.

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CHAPTER ONE

A BRIEF HISTORY OF EARLY GOTHICISM

For the past several hundred years, possibly no topic has fascinated quite so broad an audience as has the Gothic. Although the exact origins of the term itself are unclear, the word “Goth” first came about as a term used to label any of the Germanic tribes responsible for the destruction of the Roman Empire. Critics believe that the first history of the Goths was written by Jordanes in 551 AD, where he used the name of one specific Germanic tribe as a blanket term for all Germanic tribes (Punter and Byron 3). From that point onward, the meaning of the term has become increasingly convoluted. Today it has come to encompass many other ideas: a medieval style of art and sculpture, a fifteenth- and sixteenth-century architecture originally named “the French style,” an eighteenth-century term for anything from the Dark Ages, and more recently, both an underground culture and style of music that hearken to the spiritual and often dark nature of the Gothic Romantics.¹ In all these cases, the Gothics are those people or things that bring darkness and unenlightenment into the cultured world. David Punter and Glennis Byron, both authorities in the field of the literary Gothic, add that “[t]he Gothic is associated with the barbaric and uncivilized in order to define that which is other to the values of the civilized present” (5). In essence, the Gothic becomes the opposite of culture, so that through understanding what the Gothic encompasses, culture can understand what it is required to be.

The problem with defining the term comes with its ever-shifting nature, its openness to redefinition by any second-rate scholar of terror, and its willingness to accept definition from those outside of the academic world. But “if there is any general

consensus,” says Alexandra Warwick of the University of Westminster, “it seems to be that Gothic is a mode rather than a genre, that it is a loose tradition and even that its defining characteristics are its mobility and continued capacity for reinvention” (6). Although many critics would disagree with Warwick’s idea that the Gothic is not a genre, her mention of mobility just might point to the problem with defining the Gothic. The fluid nature of the Gothic allows for a major shift in the definition of “Gothic” to occur alongside every minor cultural one. Even the start of the Gothic movement coincided with such a cultural shift, as the repressions of the overly logical Age of Reason exploded into the philosophical and cynical Age of Enlightenment in the late 1600s, thus influencing some of the early Gothic tinkerers, such as Aphra Behn (1640-1689) and Horace Walpole (1717-1797). Punter and Byron agree with the idea of a culturally based Gothic, even if only implicitly, when they claim that the Gothic novel “came about as a direct result of changes in cultural emphasis in the eighteenth century” (7). They identify these changes during the rise of the Gothic when they state, “Where the classical was well ordered, the Gothic was chaotic; where the classical was simple and pure, Gothic was ornate and convoluted; where the classics offered a world of clear rules and limits, Gothic represented excess and exaggeration” (7). When Punter and Byron contrast the Gothic and the classical, they are not comparing two different time periods, but two different literary movements within the same time period.

The “classical” referenced here is the Neoclassical age of the eighteenth century, which found its inspiration in the Greco-Roman classics of antiquity. While the most obvious imitations are seen in the Pantheon-like architecture of the period, the writing styles of the Neoclassical age were also quite imitative. Authors of the “New Classics”

chose to imitate the style and themes of classical writings, such as the works of Homer, Cicero, and Virgil. Political and philosophical prose came into its popularity during the Age of Enlightenment, perhaps because of man's never-ending search for greater knowledge about the world and ways of life, but poetry was still the language of the artists. Although poetry was still the most popular form of writing during the Neoclassical period, the popularity of the novel increased dramatically during the early 1700s. The newly formed genre of "the novel" (then referred to as "the new romance") was aimed specifically at the middle- and upper-class women of England, the privileged few who had large amounts of pleasure time and very little to entertain them. Novels such as Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) and Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) were widely read during this period, and their didactic nature made them more tolerable to an Anglican Church that had previously viewed all "romances" as sinful and full of lies. This period's slow acceptance of the newly created form of the novel allowed for experimentations in later periods, when authors would stretch the laws of reality through their plots, characters, and settings.

Although the precise beginning of the Gothic as a form of the novel is highly debatable, with numerous authors being cited for their impressive influence over the creation of the subgenre, it most certainly "came about as a direct result of changes in cultural emphasis in the eighteenth century," the same changes that brought about the beginning of the Romantic period (Punter and Byron 7). Nearly all critics will agree that Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764) first drew together the most essential elements of the Gothic, such as external and temporal fear of an unknown, a distant or exotic setting, and a stark belief in the supernatural. Yet from the moment that *Otranto*

brought forth this new style of novel until the style's major philosophical shift near the end of the Victorian period, the Gothic would be continually associated with "the Ladies," both as the authors and the primary readership of the form. Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1777), Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* (1788), and Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) rose to great fame and popularity during the end of the eighteenth century. Many men shunned these types of novels as "frivolous" and "sentimental," abandoning them for more "manly" works of prose, such as the newspaper, but every female house servant and middle-class young lady clung to such novels as their primary source of entertainment.

The influence of these lady authors was widespread, touching Romantic poets such as Coleridge, Byron, and Keats and inspiring later female Gothic authors such as Mary Shelley, Charlotte Dacre, and the Brontë sisters.² While many authors of the day tried preaching to the young ladies through books, as found in Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), the Gothic authors and authoresses sought to enthrall the lady masses by placing one of their own within the realm of terror. At its inception, the Gothic novel was written by women about strong, captive women and the chivalrous men who rescued those fair maidens. The exhilaration came as the ultimate release for the middle-class woman trapped within her domestic duties or the lower-class maid who was constantly under the heel of her mistress.

During the middle of the 1700s, the primary emotion empathized by readers of the Gothic novel was that of terror. According to Fred Botting, terror is that which "activates the mind and the imagination, allowing it to overcome, transcend even, its fears and

doubts, enabling the subject to move from a state of passivity to activity . . . Terror enables escape; it allows one to delimit its effects, to distinguish and overcome the threat it manifests” (74-5). In these Gothic terror novels, supernatural occurrences and abnormal fears are rationally explained later in the plot by the author, as show below in the works of Ann Radcliffe. However, by the end of the eighteenth century, terror was slowly being replaced by horror as the primary ingredient in the Gothic novel, most probably due to the cultural shift from the concrete and empirical, which can be rationally explained, to the supernatural and ideal, which can often defy explanation. As Botting explains, horror is that which “freezes human faculties, rendering the mind passive and immobilizing the body. The cause is generally a direct encounter with physical mortality” (75). Horror usually deals in blood, gore, and the grotesque, and is often found in detailed descriptions of mortality inflicted, without any rationalization for the use of that horror; it is rarely explainable or explained. Although the division between these two terms seems superficial, the break between the two schools of writing led to the development of two very different types of Gothic novel.

These two schools of Gothic writing were established near the end of the Neoclassical period (c. 1660-1785)³ through an unspoken, but well acknowledged, argument between Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Gregory Lewis. Holding Ann Radcliffe up as the perfect example of a writer of terror, Drake implies that she laid down a form of the Gothic that should “never degenerate into horror” (qtd. in Ellis 11). Rather, for Radcliffe, the Gothic should instill a sense of terror that is agreeable to the senses but not appalling to the mind. One should still be able to act while being terrified. In one of the most famous scenes of Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily draws back the

curtain in one of the castle's chambers only to find "a corpse, stretched on a kind of low couch, which was crimson with human blood" (18). Although such a scene immediately instigates a sense of disgust, Radcliffe prevents the scene from "degenerating into horror" by promptly explaining that the corpse is nothing more than a wax figure and that the terror is caused only by the sensibility of a young girl. The result is similar to that of a grown person throwing open a closet door only to reveal that the boogeyman is not inside: an instance of terror followed by a chiding sense of relief. Radcliffe's terror bases itself on the empirical system prevalent during the eighteenth century.

On the other hand, Matthew Gregory Lewis, most well known for his novel *The Monk* (1796) and the play *The Castle Spectre* (1796), believed that the true way to captivate and enthrall an audience was through horror. Punter and Byron state that Lewis' work "was transgressive; it did not shrink from description of sexual activities and violence, and there is . . . a resistance to externally imposed rules and regulations" (141). Indeed, throughout *The Monk*, Lewis is quite crass, vividly describing the rape of Antonia and the bloody rescue of Agnes. His purpose for these descriptions is often no loftier than to provoke a reaction from the audience. His novels follow more closely in the vein of German *Schauerroman* or horror novels, which rely on sensationalism to shock readers. Lewis easily incorporates elements of terror into his works, as terror is often a precursor to horror, but these elements are subordinate to the horrors that he elucidates with his plots.

Connected closely with this idea of horror, the sublime deals with the reaction of the mind to horrifying or terrifying events. The origin of the term "sublime" is most often traced to the aesthetic work of Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the*

Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757), which David Morris terms as “a readers’ guide to the Gothic novel” (300). Within this work, Burke defines the sublime as “[w]hatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror” (9). He goes on to discuss the effects of the sublime: “Astonishment . . . is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence, and respect” (16). The sublime is then defined as an emotion arising from the reading of a text, one that overwhelms the mental senses and fills the mind with fantastic and fearful images. With Gothic novels in the vein of Radcliffe, the sublime serves to raise a woman’s emotions, only to show her what an emotionally driven being her novel’s heroine has been. For those novels after the style of Lewis, which includes most Gothic novels written after the eighteenth century, the sublime is used to horrify, to paint so grotesque a picture upon the mind that the reader cannot help but think of his or her own disgust.

Additionally, as is suggested by the title of his work, Burke did not believe that beauty and sublimity could exist within the same object at the same time. In this way, the sublime becomes directly connected to horror and fear, as it arises out of the negative within a novel rather than the positive. Perhaps it was for this reason that the focus of many of the early Gothic novels was the beautiful female; only she could balance out the negative energy of the sublime. As the religious attitudes of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries faded and the newer science of psychology, of which Freud was a principal founder, became ever more popular, the sublime became the forerunner of all Gothic horror.

The early Gothic writers, children during the age of Enlightenment, formed novels very much in the vein of Radcliffe's school of terror. However, as the eighteenth century came to a close and the freedom of the Romantic period (c. 1785-1830) took hold of the literary scene, the Gothic novel abandoned the traditions of Radcliffian Gothicism and followed the trend of "horrid novels" such as Lewis's *Monk*. Reacting against the rigid, scientific nature of the eighteenth century, the Romantics idealized those poetic and narrative features that allowed for freedom from form and conventions. For many of the Romantics, uncontrollable nature was preferred over the civilized and tamed. Emotions and love, like nature, were allowed to run free, not restricted by the world surrounding them. The Romantics looked to the literature of the Renaissance or the Medieval period for inspiration and saw in those pieces a romanticized lifestyle that was worthy of emulation. Botting writes that Romantic authors were "[d]rawing on the anti-rational and mystical powers associated with a bardic romance tradition" (98). These authors appreciated the spiritual nature of those ancient traditions and intertwined the older forms of mysticism with the literature of the age, creating a spiritual attitude very different from the prevalent Christian stance of the previous age.

For these reasons, the Gothic novel of the Romantic period was a novel in transition. Many of the conventions of horror were borrowed from German horror tales (similar to Lewis's Gothic), but the Romantic writers also created their share of new Gothic conventions. Much more so than earlier Gothic novels, the Romantic-Gothic focused specifically on the psychological identity of the individual. The constant push for the rights of the individual during the Romantic period appeared in the Romantic-Gothic through the personal, individualistic struggles of the "Byronic" protagonists.

Botting described the Gothic hero as “gloomy, isolated and sovereign. [T]hey are wanderers, outcasts and rebels condemned to roam the borders of social worlds, bearers of a dark truth or horrible knowledge, like Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner*” (98). For the Romantics, the hero became the outcast, the one able to transcend himself and the world around him. The hero constantly struggled with himself as he searched the world for truth. During the later parts of the Romantic-Gothic, the hero’s struggling emotions would often split into two separate entities. This split occurred either through scientific means, as in Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), or through spiritual means, as in Coleridge’s *Christabel* (1800). However, through all the sufferings and wanderings of the individual, the Romantic-Gothic hero tended to remain in the distant past or a far-off country. Rarely did he travel to the contemporary age, and never to modern England.

As the period of Romanticism ended, a new literary regime rose up in the wake of Queen Victoria’s coronation and the Industrial Revolution. Society became ever more concerned with the rapid urban growth and the terrifying scientific discoveries that seemed to increase daily, and the authors and critics of the day wasted no time in incorporating those fears into their literature. The horrors of the Romantic-Gothic, conveniently displaced from everyday British life to the distant lands of Italy or the Orient, were now thrust into the narrow alleys and dark recesses of a crime and disease-infested Victorian London: “Victorian Gothic is marked primarily by the domestication of Gothic figures, spaces, and themes” (Punter and Byron 26). Radcliffe’s abbess becomes Dacre’s madwoman, Smith’s castle becomes Stevenson’s urban city, and the true terror is not found in the lurking shadows of the Reeve’s bedchamber, but in the lurking shadows of one’s own mind. The transition to the psychological, begun by the

Romantics, was perfected by the Victorians, causing the new horror to come to life in the mind of the reader.

The excess and exaggeration of the Romantic-Gothic carried over into the straight-jacketed Victorian culture, but for the Victorians, the enemy was not merely the Papal system or Catholic France. Rather, the enemy became culture itself, and by the end of the nineteenth century, cultural fears had rebirthed themselves within the Gothic. The cultural shifts of the *fin de siècle* were expressed through a shift away from the traditional settings and villains of the original Gothic authors of the 1700s and toward an expression of the religious concerns of a nation. In *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*, literary scholar Andrew Sanders gives a reasonable explanation about why these shifts occurred at the *fin de siècle*: “It was not simply that certain opinions had gone out of fashion, or had been discredited, but that late Victorian readers tended to condition the idea of human progress with a prominent Darwinian question mark” (458). Instead of any type of progression, the Victorian Gothic seemed focused on the animal-like regressions seen within society, regressions that the most upright of Victorian citizens attempted daily to remove from their prudent, structured lives.

As society became ever more questioning of the authority of Christianity and the Church, rational science and sensual skepticism became the religion of the age. The rise of “science” fiction, which began with Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, continued in much more horrifying fashion with the experiments of Dr. Jekyll, for as explained in *The Gothic*, “The majority of the abhuman bodies [were] the product not of supernatural forces but of scientifically explainable processes” (Punter and Byron 41). Not only were science experiments going awry, but the Un-dead were reemerging in society’s light with

the publication of novels such as *Dracula* and *Vendetta!*, releasing with their stories all of the inner passions repressed by the Victorian society. The “rise of the undead,” however, had very little to do with objective science and everything to do with the occult, which worked its way into culture through séances, used to gain insight into the unknown and, sometimes, the demonic.

CHAPTER TWO

FIN DE SIÈCLE RELIGION

A widely dissimilar attitude existed between the English culture of the Romantics and the English culture of the Victorians, leading to a different use for the Gothic novel. The Romantics were wild and free, idolizing objects such as the uncivilized native, the innocent child, and the overgrown castle throughout much of their poetry. With the eighteenth-century Gothic novel as their catalyst, many Romantic-Gothic novelists portrayed their fears of Catholic Italy and war-torn France through uncontrolled monks and abusive authority figures. But by the time of Lord Byron's death in 1824, Romanticism was on the decline. Even before Queen Victoria's ascension in 1837, many of the elements now associated with Victorianism appeared in British society.¹ The ornate was sought over simplicity, the orderly over the wild and free, and God went from being present in nature to being seated on His heavenly throne, impersonal and removed. As Thomas Boyle wrote of nineteenth-century Britain in *Black Swine in the Sewers of Hampstead*, "The [Victorian] universe was supposed to be a neat and tidy place, presided over by one Christian deity, infused by 'immutable' laws which promised healthy forward movement in all matters," including matters of "respectability, scientific progress, and religion" (76). The truth, though, was that the Victorian universe was far from tidy. The citizens of England attacked the Anglican Church and its Christian theologies, if not blatantly, then at least through the citizens' actions.²

The religious struggles of the age appeared in many different forms within the Gothic novel. Beginning in the early 1830s, quick chills could be purchased in serial form for the price of a penny. According to John Springhall in his essay "Disseminating

Impure Literature': The 'Penny Dreadful' Publishing Business Since 1860," these 'penny dreadfuls' or 'penny blood' were "melodramatic and sensational, but generally harmless, serial novels, published in instalment, periodical, and complete novel form that, from 1860s onwards, found a new following among the increasingly literate young [adults]" (568-569). The name was derived partially from the cost of the installment or periodical. The term "dreadful," Springhall explains, was "constructed by middle-class journalists in order to amplify social anxiety or 'moral panic' over the latest commercial innovation directed at the young" (568). The Gothic romanticization of heroism and the Church presented in these tales flew in the face of Victorian propriety and order, and as these "penny dreadful" were published for the working classes and the young, the middle-aged, middle-class Britons feared an erosion of the Victorian principles upon which they had established their lives.

During the early years of the long Victorian period (1830-1901), the Anglican Church grew rapidly in size and fragmented in theological position, with half the Church taking on the theology of the Evangelical movement, while the other half returned to many of the Catholic rites (ritualism) that had been abandoned in previous years.³ Religious orders of cloistered sister and brothers, which belonged exclusively to the Catholic Church prior to this time, were reestablished within the Anglican community, and Anglican churches were once again built in the ornate and gothic fashion of the ancient cathedrals. Sheridan Gilley documents that "[t]he outward and visible expression of the Anglican Revival was the biggest boom in church building and restoration in English history: more churches were built between 1830 and 1880 than in any half century before or since" (320). He also notes that Anglican priests and clerics abounded during this

period, with each respectable family containing at least one member who was ordained with the Church of England (319-20). The result was a culture thoroughly engrossed in the life of the Church, as the priests became neighbors and relatives, rather than lofty members of a higher religious order.

Still, not all of Britain followed the leadings of the Anglican Church, including the Protestant movements that followed the teachings of John and Charles Wesley and John Calvin. However, the second most predominant religion in the United Kingdom during the Victorian period was not evangelical Protestantism, but Catholicism. While the citizens of England and Wales adhered primarily to one of the several Protestant movements (including the Anglican Church), the citizens of Ireland were almost exclusively Roman Catholic.⁴ When the Act of Union in 1800 united the country of Ireland with Great Britain, the Irish Catholics were placed under the authority of the Anglican Church. The Irish were unified under one flag with the people of Great Britain, and the economic situation in Ireland of the 1800s was failing. The result was a mass immigration of Irish citizens to America or, in many cases, to London. According to Mark Knight and Emma Mason in their work *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature*, “In the same way that alarm at the French Revolution reinvigorated a long tradition of British anti-Catholicism at the end of the eighteenth century, other events, including, as Susan Griffin reminds us, ‘the heavy Irish immigration to England and the United States following the 1845 failure of the potato crop’, ‘revivified them in the nineteenth century’” (193-4). This rapid immigration, combined with the addition of Ireland to the United Kingdom, exposed the vulnerability of their own religious culture to the citizens of England. Knight and Mason note that “[a]mong the myriad of reasons behind this

prejudicial attitude was the perception of Catholicism in the British imagination as a threat to national identity (which had come to be understood as Protestant)” (194). For the Protestants of Britain, even the most remote resemblance to Popery was met with hostility.⁵ To them, the outright practice of Catholicism in the streets of London by Irish immigrants was almost unbearable.

Christianity as found in the Victorian Gothic novel took an entirely separate role than it did in the Gothic novels of a hundred years earlier. Nancy Cervetti agrees, claiming that although both Church and biblical allusions play large roles in the Victorian narratives, “there is not pervasive feeling that ‘trailing clouds of glory do we come from God, who is our home’ . . . [The Bible] is myth mined for its familiarity and evocative power rather than for its authority” (94). While the Victorians knew the stories of the Bible, the deeper theological issues and interpretations of critical biblical passages were abandoned by middle-class citizens to the academics and intellectuals. In connection with the shifts in Christian biblical interpretation, the Victorian Gothic became less concerned with the metaphysics of faith and religion, and more concerned with experiencing the concrete embodiments of spirituality, which appeared in the form of ghosts, demons, and vampires.

The increased interest in the spirit world that began in the Romantic era led to a rise in mysticism and superstition during the Victorian period. While many Britons attended church services on Sundays, the rest of the week was often spent consulting mediums and holding séances with the dead, actions which point toward an extreme superstition about ghosts and the afterlife. In *The Idiot’s Guide to Ghosts and Hauntings*, Tom Ogden mentions the story of the Browning Circle séance, named so because of the

presence of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, during which the dead son of one of the sitters came from beyond the grave and presented himself to the group. The séance convinced Browning of the authenticity of the spirit world and made her fearful of the spirits, willing to appease the spirits in any way possible (84). Stories abound of Victorian séances that resulted in communications from beyond the grave, and nearly every influential British citizen of the mid- to late-1800s participated in these practices. Additionally, automatic writing boards became trendy in the late 1800s, and one critic writes that Elijah Bond took the popular boards and patented the idea in 1892, calling the new toy the “Ouija board” (Ogden 92). Working as personal “mediums,” these boards served as portals for the spirits to speak to the living, allowing the dead to express their wishes to those who remained on earth.

Another reason for this rapid shift in Christian sentiments was the introduction of evolutionary theories by Charles Darwin (1809-1882). While different theories of evolution had been circulating England for over a hundred years,⁶ Darwin first popularized the theory of natural selection with his work *On the Origin of Species* (1859), followed closely by *The Descent of Man* (1871), in which he applied his theories of natural selection, found in the former work, to human sexuality. Darwin’s scientific rationalization made sense to the Victorians, who were desperately grasping for some piece of truth about the purpose of their existence. In the article “The Victorianism of Victorian Literature,” Michael Timko describes the effect of the Victorian acceptance of Darwinian principles:

With the Darwinian view of man, the full impact of which was first felt in the Victorian period, there were no longer any recognizable guidelines or

aids. There was no longer any divine hierarchy or chain of being; gone even was the “unorthodox” hope of pantheism that sustained so many of the Romantics. The Victorians were the first to face the problem of defining man’s humanness. (615-16)

The Great Chain of Being, first introduced in medieval times and reiterated in the Romantic period as a divine ordinance, was undermined by Darwin’s laws of nature. Even if God had established the process of evolution, as many Victorians suggested, the result was a distant and cold god, unconcerned with the plight of man. Although the Established Church still existed within England, the authority of the Church was slowly diminishing as the century wore on, just as God’s authority was waning. The Church slowly became a tradition carried on for tradition’s sake, not a means to worship God or bring the soul into a relationship with the Creator. “Religion” was formed by the convictions of the individual as influenced by nature, not by the will of an ecclesiastical establishment.

Also, the continued Victorian belief in scientific positivism, a theory claiming that the truth can be known only through scientific terms, led to the belief that science could solve all of problems of the universe. The empirical method, used to test scientific hypotheses, suggested that the world could be perceived only through the senses, or the things that one could measure through sight, sound, taste, touch, or smell. One of the outgrowths of this line of thinking was aestheticism, a “religion” that claims man-made beauty and art alone are real and worthy of worship, and combating the idea that science gives all-encompassing answers to truth in the world. Another was the decadence movement of the 1890s because, as Christine Ferguson claims, decadence was “the

fulfillment and logical conclusion of one of the most fundamental of all Victorian values, scientific positivism” (466). Decadence spoke to the fulfillment of the most carnal, sensual, and animal-like quality of human existence: sex. Extreme adherence to the aesthetic movement, according to Ferguson, would then lead directly to decadence and debauchery.⁷ Decadence, however, flew directly in the face of all Victorian ideals, especially society’s repression of outward sexuality and the individual’s repression of his animal-like qualities, showing the declining respect given to Victorian morality by the end of the 1800s.

Even with the religious upheavals that ran through Victorian culture, reading continued to be one of the most popular pastimes of the Victorian period. Especially popular toward the end of the period were psychological novels and Gothic horror tales. But when the Gothic was reborn in the 1890s, the enemy was no longer placed in Italy or Catholic France. The dark, rotting corners of Industrial England and the unknown horrors of Eastern Europe brought more terror to the contemporary heart than did the known European lands ravaged by revolution in past decades. For the first time in the history of the Gothic novel, setting was not distanced from the audience by miles or years. Instead, the Gothic came to the Victorian reader’s front door, and the authors allowed their readers to assume that such horrors could happen any day to the citizens of Britain. Catholicism still existed as the enemy, but materialism, spirituality, and aestheticism stood as Gothic villains as well. The Gothic story existed in a Victorian England that was beautiful on the surface, but horrid and ghastly under the surface of the fog.

As the *fin de siècle* progressed and the Victorian era essentially died with its

queen in 1901, a cold cynicism swept through England. Philosophers throughout Europe attacked the morality system upheld by Victorian society, claiming that the dichotomy between good and evil was too harsh and unrealistic. Thinkers such as John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) supported the “greatest happiness” principle, a form of Utilitarianism initiated by Jeremy Bentham, which deems that morality is found in the action that provides the greatest happiness for the largest number of people. In such a framework, evil is virtually non-existent; an action produces either happiness or dissatisfaction, so actions can only be placed in a hierarchy, not a dichotomy. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) held a similar opinion of the good/evil opposition, claiming that one should differentiate only between good and bad (physical), rather than good and evil (spiritual). Connected to this idea, Nietzsche also declared the death of God, which stemmed from his belief that by rejecting evil, society no longer had need of an omnipotent ruler and thus had destroyed the god that existed within its mind.

Even if society did not go so far as to accept the radical atheism that Nietzsche proposed, the public did develop a distaste for God, religion, and absolutes. Gilley cites noted Christian apologetics writer G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936): “[B]y the late nineteenth century, the radical dogmatic convictions of early Victorian England had gone,” transforming England into “a world unsure even in its doubt” (326). As Chesterton so often claimed in the 1890s, the Victorians went so far as to be unsure that they doubted their religion. Some religious groups tried to rationalize doubt, claiming that it was part of God’s perfect plan and therefore not truly doubt, while others simply lost faith in the absolute nature of God and the Holy Scriptures. Agnosticism became one of the many religions of the *fin de siècle*, as culture accepted the possibility that the only

certainty in life was that nothing was certain.

The *fin-de-siècle* was a time of repression and excess, of literary extremes and psychological fulfillment, all of which were reflected perfectly in the most extreme and anti-cultural literary genre of the age: the Gothic novel. During the 1890s especially, the excess and decadence of the late Victorian period, reactions against the perceived puritanical institution of the Church, exploded in a myriad of ghost stories, psychological thrillers, and vampire fiction, all of which could be found within the popular “penny dreadful” and Gothic tales. Nina Auerbach may sum it up best: “[T]he deliberate freakishness of [1890s] imagery illuminates earlier ideals of respectability and later conventions of advanced thought” (15). Not only does the imagery illuminate Victorian ideals, such as sexual purity, devotion to family, or the upholding of Christian morality, but that same imagery criticized the religious troubles that were hiding under the surface of Victorian pragmatism. The next few chapters will be dedicated to specific examples of the religious turmoil that plagued *fin de siècle* England. Three of the most popular novels of the period will be examined: Marie Corelli’s *Vendetta!* (1886), Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), and Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). Although none of these authors intentionally set out to write a religious novel, each novel incorporates specific elements of Catholic and Anglican doctrine into the story’s plot. These elements serve to criticize a religious aspect of British *fin de siècle* culture. While Corelli criticizes the flamboyant and heartless Catholic Church that was reemerging within London culture, Stoker points toward the Catholic Church as the one true means to gain freedom from superstition, while Wilde uses the image of Faust to show that the religions of

decadence and aestheticism, when taken to an extreme, cannot bring the same fulfillment that is found within Christianity.

CHAPTER THREE

OUR MOTHER AND ENEMY, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Virtually unknown today outside of Victorian circles, Marie Corelli (1855-1924) was once the most popular writer of her day. Teresa Ransom claims that Corelli was “a household name in 1900” (1), while Annette Federico titles her “the Queen of best-sellers” (14). Janet Casey outlines the specifics of this popularity. Citing Brian Masters’ *Now Barabbas was a Rotter: The Extraordinary Life of Marie Corelli*, she writes that “[m]ore than half of [Corelli’s] thirty books were world bestsellers, translated into virtually every European language and many Asian languages; at the height of her fame, in 1906, over 100,000 copies of her books were sold, more than those sold by Rudyard Kipling, Arthur Conan Doyle, and H.G. Wells combined” (163). In spite of Corelli’s extensive popularity and nine biographies on the author’s life, very few concrete facts are known about this lady’s life, partially because Corelli was known to have blatantly lied about facts of her life, such as her age and the identity of her parents. Additionally, she loved to fabricate exotic stories about her past, much in the same way as later author William Faulkner would do. What is known today about the author’s life comes from the letters and facts that she allowed to be released, all of which paint a romanticized picture of this sensational author.

Unlike her personal life, Corelli’s stance on the prevalent issues in Victorian culture is extremely clear, as she spelled out her views in extensive details through the characters of her novels. Her novels address many of the tumultuous religious, social, and scientific issues of late Victorian England, including the New Woman in society, the rise of Darwinism, the increasing use of technology in daily life, and the rapid

deterioration of Christian faith. Not only did Corelli use her novels to deal with the numerous problems of her day, but she also employed several styles of writing while discussing these issues because, as she wrote in a letter to a friend, “I wish to prove that I am capable of more than one style of novel, and that the simply sensational will form but a very small part of my future work” (qtd. in Federico 17). Corelli seems to have kept her promise, although most of her novels still contain aspects of the supernatural. While her first four novels relied heavily on aspects of the Gothic and sensational novels,¹ her future novels did not necessarily follow in the same vein. However, she did realize that one reason her books were so popular was, as Brenda Ayres has pointed out, that they offered “an alternate belief that united science and spirit” (210). For Corelli, style served as a means to further the plot and the morality of the tale. If the Gothic worked to further her opinions on the Church or a new form of technology, then Corelli would employ the Gothic. Otherwise, she would choose whichever form caught her fancy or served her purpose.

One issue on which Corelli was quite outspoken was that of religion and hypocrisy. According to Ransom, “[Corelli] preached against corruption in the Church and deplored the worldliness and lack of faith of the priests. In ‘Society and Sunday’, she declared that Sunday was being ignored. Cards and gambling or motoring were much to blame, and it was largely the fault of the clergy, who were out of touch with modern thought” (2). Corelli recognized the failure of the Established Church to fulfill the spiritual longings of the British people. Seeking to rid herself of the spiritualism that saturated many of the Christian movements of her day, Corelli created her own religion by incorporating elements of Christianity, Eastern religions, and the occult into a theory

that she ultimately dubbed her Christian “Electric Creed.”² She saw the Established Church as hypocritical, because the Church held to a theology that forbade witchcraft, while its parishioners practiced different forms of mysticism and spirituality throughout the week. Corelli, on the other hand, did not see herself as hypocritical, because she claimed no allegiance to mainstream Christianity, and her “Electric Creed” made allowances for such beliefs in the occult. Most Victorians agreed with Corelli, viewing the occult and Spiritualism as yet another “natural” science that God had provided to reveal Himself to mankind.

Central in her new religion was the mystic belief in reincarnation. For Corelli, the soul could not die but rather went through a series of rebirths in order to purify itself. When physical death occurred, the soul transferred itself from an old body to a new one. If the individual’s actions remain pure enough through several lifetimes, he could eventually be reincarnated into the spiritual realm, or nirvana. Throughout all these transformations, however, the life force of the individual remains attached to the soul. Because the life exists within the soul, death never truly occurs in Corelli’s world. However, reincarnation was only one of the many aspects of Corelli’s creed. In her article “Marie Corelli’s Best-Selling Electric Creed,” Robyn Hallim details the other major aspect of Corelli’s theory:

[Corelli] selects familiar events from the Old Testament, intended to fulfil people’s need for stability and continuity in religious tradition, and combines them with allusions to ancient . . . civilizations, designed to satisfy contemporary interest in the Orient as the cradle of philosophy, mysticism, and the occult. These are combined with selections from the

New Testament, which identify Christ with light, and with contemporary pseudoscientific notions of powers ascribed to light, heat, electricity, and radioactivity, in order to explain the creation of the universe, Old Testament phenomena, the miracles of Christ, and nineteenth century discoveries and innovations. (270)

By incorporating the Old Testament association of God with a pillar of fire into her new ideas of religion, Corelli attempts to explain all questions of religion with her association of God with electricity and light.³ Her readings of the Scriptures emphasize the words “light” and “lightening,” associating these things with the power of God. She gives these elements a spiritual authority, what would now be defined as a New Age aura, and combines Christian traditions with Victorian spirituality.⁴

While Marie Corelli’s complicated religious creed influences all her novels, *Vendetta! or The Story of One Forgotten* (1886) seems less concerned with the “scientific” notions of the creed and more concerned with questioning the ineffective nature of the Church. Hallim lists *Vendetta!* as one of Corelli’s few novels that “[lacks] explicit reference to evolution and/or Darwinism” (268), implying that the focus of the novel lies in directions other than natural science. Instead, the religious emphasis in this story is placed on the hypocritical Catholic Church, a common motif in early Gothic sensational novels. In fact, the issues of Catholicism and religion within the novel are directly tied to the novel’s intrinsic Gothic-ness. Elaine Hartnell writes, “The Gothic elements in Corelli’s writing undoubtedly arise directly from the sacred . . . whilst the morals arise from the dramatization of the supernatural, that is, the Gothic” (299). As a precursor to the resurgence of the Gothic within the 1890s, Corelli incorporated elements

of the Radcliffian plot and setting, which included this “dramatization of the supernatural,” with natural sciences such as Darwinism, psychoanalysis, occultism, and theosophy.

Nonetheless, the new Gothic that would emerge with force during the 1890s is also present within Corelli’s early novels (1886-1890). Hartnell explains that Corelli’s “novels contain thematic elements from every phase of the Gothic, from the tortuous labyrinths and heightened sensibilities of *The Castle of Otranto* and the sensuous excesses of *Vathek*, to the contemporaneity of *The Vampire Lestat* and the scenes of mass destruction to be found in horror films such as *Carrie*” (285), and *Vendetta!* is no exception. One of the popular elements of *fin de siècle* Gothic is personality doubling, as seen in Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and to an extent in Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818). Most of these instances of the Gothic double involve some type of burial and resurrection that occurs in a mysterious, sometimes supernatural setting. Signor Romani’s “resurrection” and transformation of character point toward this newer usage of the Gothic double, although Corelli does not play with this element of the story to the same extent as do some of the later Gothic writers.

Additionally, the dark psychological thrills of a graveyard vault and a live burial, present in the scenes of Romani’s resurrection, embody the very essence of Gothicism. The terror of Romani’s realization that he “had been buried – buried alive” (23) was a fate that terrified most people of the eighteenth and nineteenth century; on his deathbed in 1799, George Washington had his servants swear to allow the former president to lie in state for three days before burial, to prevent premature burial. The impenetrable darkness of a family vault allows unknown creatures to creep through the psychological

imagination and the physical space unseen. While in the vault, “[a] shrill cry, piercing, prolonged, and melancholy, echoed through the hollow arches of [Romani’s] tomb” (26). Romani immediately breaks out in “[a] cold perspiration” (26) at this unknown sound, which later proves to be merely an owl. However, the psychological strain of unknown and unseen sounds, especially so soon after a near-death experience, causes Romani’s heart to stop, along with many readers’ hearts as well.

The second modern Gothic implication comes with Corelli’s use of the “plague” as the source of initial terror within the novel. As the narrator, Romani details the summer of his death: “Every one knows what kind of summer we had in Naples in 1884. The newspapers of all lands teemed with the story of its horrors. The cholera walked abroad like a destroying demon; under its withering touch scores of people, young and old, dropped down in the streets to die” (14). In referencing this horrific event, Corelli is drawing her novel into the realm of the modern Gothic in two different ways. First, the use of a disease as the antagonist to the characters shows the contemporary scientific concerns with health and contagious diseases. While death in the original Gothic was often attributed to supernatural elements, death in the modern Gothic was often attributed to very real and often scientific reasons, such as blood diseases and health problems. Most often, the manifestation of these diseases resulted in the appearance of blood-sucking vampires, but sometimes it also resulted in an increased fascination with infectious diseases within the Gothic plot. Secondly, Corelli uses a health episode that was continuing to affect Naples at the time of the novel’s publication in 1886.⁵ By bringing the plot of the novel into the present day, Corelli shows the vulnerability of her own readers, a technique frequently used in later Gothic novels but rarely used in earlier

Gothic novels, which separated the reading population from the setting by both physical distance and time.

However, as a bridge novel between the Romantic Gothic and the Gothic of the *fin de siècle*, Corelli also used elements of the pre-Victorian Gothic within her plot. Unlike most Gothic novels of its time period, which were set in London or the colonies, *Vendetta!* is set in Naples. By removing her plot to Italy, Corelli recalls Gothic tales like Radcliffe's *The Italian*, also set in Catholic Naples, or Lewis's *The Monk*, set in Inquisition Spain, even though she also ties the novel to the modern movement through the recent occurrence of the events. Additionally, her choice of a more Radcliffian Gothic mode allows for direct criticism of the Catholic Church than would have been less probable in the more scientifically-structured Gothic of the 1890s.⁶ In the vein of these old Gothic tales, Corelli portrays Catholics as having an evil, conniving nature. Because the story is set in Catholic Naples, all of the characters are associated with the Catholic Church and, to varying degrees, are painted as hypocrites to their faith. The old Neapolitan who sells garments to Fabio is described as "the old blasphemer," asking God to allow the plague to kill more of his fellow countrymen so that he can sell their clothes (38). The implications of the old man's words and actions are not only anti-Catholic, but also anti-Christian. The man jokes about the thousands of deaths occurring around him while wishing himself prosperity at their expense. Even to the most heartless of readers, the joking nature of this old man would have been in poor taste and an outrage to Christian morality.

But the analysis of the Catholic Church within the novel goes much deeper than just the literal references to religion, delving into psychoanalysis of the women within the

novel. The majority of the women portrayed within the novel are both mothers and wives, and these women are divided into two groups: those faithful to their family and those unfaithful to their husbands and children. While the first group of women exemplifies the Victorian ideal of the angels in the house, the second group speaks not only to the marital infidelity occurring behind closed doors in England, but also to the religious infidelity of the Catholic Church. Repeatedly, the text mentions “the splendid hypocrisy of women” (155), claiming that it is just “[a]nother proof of the [general] woman’s utter heartlessness” (145). While Corelli does use the women of her text to critique social and marriage issues in contemporary England, every heartless woman within the text can also be read as a metaphor for the ultimate heartless woman, the Roman Catholic Church.

Almost from its inception, the universal (or catholic) Church was referred to as the “Mother of all Christians.” In his letters to the church bishops, Pope Saint Gregory I (590-604) writes that believers should “return to the Catholic Church which is the mother of all the elect” (82).⁷ Many other bishops and popes also declare the Catholic Church to be that same Mother figure. After the numerous denominational splits during the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church retained the title of “Our Mother,” while other denominations avoided the title for fear of association with the Catholic veneration of the Madonna. In addition to the writings of the bishops and popes, numerous biblical passages picture the Body of Christ, or the Church, as the Bride of Christ and his future wife, including one passage that reads, “For I [God] have espoused you [the Church] to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor. 11.2). By the time of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, written after his second letter to the Corinthians,

husbands are to “love [their] wives, even as Christ also loved the church” (Eph. 5.25), implying through the metaphor that Christ and the Church are now married. The universal church is then not only the Mother of all Christians, but also the wife of Christ.

For Signore Romani, only two women fulfill the role of mother or wife in any positive way – the Madonna and his own mother.⁸ His comments about the Madonna are typical of most Catholics, praising the Holy Mother for blessing sailors and for her motherly love. Although Romani is extremely pessimistic about the actions of women, he places the Madonna above all other women. He remarks, “I know too that God had very little to do with the making of women. It was a long time before even He could find the Madonna” (41). God chose the Madonna of all women to be the Mother of Christ, and Romani acknowledges this fact, despite his cynical comment about the creation of women. About his mother, however, Romani is only positive: “She was a beautiful woman unconscious of her beauty” (121). He is speaking of his mother’s literal beauty while also speaking of the figurative beauty of the Christian church. To Romani, the true Christian church should be pleasing to the senses, just as his mother was full of beauty. This beauty extends to the church’s buildings and religious ceremonies, with the Catholic Church standing as the prime example of ritualistic and physical beauty. However, the second part of Romani’s statement contrasts the beauty, showing that the church should be unaware of its own beauty so as to prevent arrogance about the power that the church wields. For this reason, the Catholic Church is damnable. She thrives in her beauty, that is the beauty of her building and the beauty of her rituals, but her awareness of that beauty makes her haughty. The ideal “Mother” church is like Romani’s mother, while the Catholic Church can only be compared to the haughty and devilish woman found in

the character of Romani's wife, Signora Nina Romani.

Nina's devilish behavior in the novel comes out first in connection to her position as wife. Mere hours after Romani's "death," Nina is found by her own husband to be in the arms of his best friend, Guido. Stunned, Romani mentally cries, "She whom I loved – she as delicate of form, as angel-like in face, as the child-bride of Christ, St. Agnes – she, even she, was – what? A thing lower than the beasts" (63). Prior to this moment, Romani viewed his wife as worthy of veneration, a saint among humans. In describing her, Romani gives his Nina the air of a deity. However, after the truth of Nina's infidelity is revealed, Romani is only able to view her as a fallen creature, the harlot of Babylon. When Guido grabs Nina in his arms and crushes a rose against the white gauze of her dress, Romani can only focus on the red blot that is left on his wife's chest. From that point forward in Romani's eyes, Nina is no longer the spotless white bride of her youth. Instead of being the immaculate Church and the bride of Christ, she is a beautiful demon, lying to men and deceiving them with her beauty, while secretly plotting to destroy their souls and tear out their hearts.

Numerous times throughout the work, Romani comments on the lying nature of his wife, normally in connection with her beauty or her sexuality. After a bout of particular coyishness from Nina, Romani comments, "God! how the lies poured forth! a very cascade of them! and they were all told with such an air of truth!" (159). The Church, too, tells its stories and holds to its traditions as the only truths, but to many outside of the fold of the Catholic Church, these stories and traditions were seen only as lies. Even at the end of the novel, Romani still suffers from disbelief over the lies he was told: "Oh, wife!" he exclaimed, "wife that I so ardently loved – wife that I would have

died for indeed, had you bade me! – why did you betray me?” (319). Despite Romani’s intense devotion to his wife, Nina still chooses to abandon the man that she accepted as her husband for a poor painter who struggles to make a living.

But Nina lacks more than just the fidelity of a wife; she also lacks the heart of a mother, having given birth to a child that she often neglects. When his daughter Stella is still living, Romani perceives the torturous treatment of the young girl by Nina and her lover Guido: “Whenever she [Stella] was fretful or petulant, they evidently impressed it upon her that her father had left her because of her naughtiness” (123). Nina impresses upon her own daughter the sinfulness of the little girl’s way, not allowing for the forgiveness of sins, but constantly reminding Stella of her wickedness. Equally, the Catholic Church was seen as unforgiving. Although the priests issued absolutions for sins committed, many non-Catholics saw the continual requirement for confession of sins as the Church’s constant reminder of that sin. To those people, the Church is seen as reminding its parishioners of their human wrongdoings while failing to ultimately give a form of reconciliation, just as Nina never allows reconciliation for her daughter.

Also, Nina fails to care for her daughter when the young girl lies on her death bed, neglecting the “last rites” of the child to be with her mother. Instead, Nina is fulfilling her own desires and protecting her own assets, so much so that Romani comments, “And so while [Guido] Ferrari had taken his fill of rapturous embraces and lingering farewells [of Nina], my little one had been allowed to struggle in pain and fever without her mother’s care or comfort” (144). Like Nina, the Church is so concerned with flattering her physical nature and deceiving others into joining her fold that she neglects her own children, those who have already devoted themselves to her. As Stella lies dying through

the lack of her mother's care, Nina is searching for other souls to devour. Similarly, the Catholic Church of the late 1800s was continually drawing new members into its doors, but neglecting those that had been made a part of the Church.

Nina's heartless and deceptive nature is contagious, infecting Romani by increasing degrees as the novel progresses. The pinnacle of Romani's infection comes while he is plotting against Guido. Romani hosts a dinner party for the recently returned Guido, located within a dining hall that is made up in striking décor to be a type of church. Romani describes the decorations of the room in detail:

The walls were hung with draperies of gold-colored silk and crimson velvet, interspersed here and there with long mirrors, which were ornamented with crystal candelabra, in which twinkled hundreds of lights under rose-tinted glass shades. At the back of the room, a miniature conservatory was displayed to view . . . Here, later on, a band of stringed instruments and a choir of boys' voices were to be stationed. (184)

Gold is the color traditionally associated with Christmas, the liturgical season during which the dinner occurs, while crimson is associated with the sacrifice of Christ during all seasons. The rose-tinted glass recalls images of light dancing through the stained glass of a church, and the location of the musicians and choir at the back of the room imitates the common practice of pre-Vatican II Catholic communities to place the organ and the choir as the back of the church sanctuary so as not to distract parishioners from the solemnity of the Mass.⁹ While in this make-shift church, Romani succeeds in deceiving all those present to conspire with him against his old friend Guido. The result is a duel where everyone will second for Romani, but no one will second for Guido.

By the end of the novel, Romani has become as heartless as his wife, causing Church and parishioner to war against each other. At the end of the novel, Romani escorts his twice-married wife to the Romani family vault, showing her the empty coffin of her “dead” husband and revealing himself to be the risen Romani. While the two argue within the vault, a storm brews outside, shaking the walls and causing “a tremendous crash [to resound] through the vault” (324). Finding his footing after the tremors subside, Romani looks up to see that “[a]n enormous block of stone, dislodged by the violence of the storm, had fallen from the roof of the vault; fallen sheer down over the very place where *she* had sat a minute or two before, fantastically smiling” (325). Nina’s grotesque and abnormal death points toward the Gothic within the novel. When Romani approaches the crushed body of his wife, he can “see nothing, save one white hand protruding” (375). The image of a small hand with “yet warm finger-tips” (375), sticking out from the ragged edges of a large stone, produces the same horror as do many different scenes within Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, including one that shows “a corpse, stretched on a kind of low couch, which was crimson with human blood” (18). The image of a pale, death hand pointing at the damned Romani carries throughout the last few pages of the novel and supposedly haunts Romani until the end of his life.

However, the ultimate judgment of Nina and the Church does not come through human means but from supernatural ones. After seeing the stone that has crushed his wife, Romani recognizes the horror of supernatural retribution: “Oh, God of inexorable justice, surely Thy vengeance was greater than mine!” (325). God has thus judged Nina and found her guilty of neglect and deception. The Catholic Church, too, has been deemed unworthy of existence by God Himself. After death, her beauty can no longer be

used to manipulate and deceive the innocent men of the earth. God's divine judgment eliminates at least one hypocritical religious organization from its place of authority over the citizens of Naples, although the novel ends without providing an alternative to the evilness of the Mother Church.

Regardless of the ever-increasing anti-Catholicism that was present in England at the time, not all British saw the Catholic Church as the ultimate evil, as did Corelli.¹⁰ In their work *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature*, Knight and Mason point out the criticism of Corelli's stance by her own Anglican contemporaries:

While the main ecclesial target of Corelli's novels is the Roman Catholic Church, an Anglican reviewer of her work, writing for *The Church Quarterly Review* in January 1901, felt the need of 'protesting somewhat indignantly against the vilification of a Church which, in spite of many shortcomings, is, and ever has been, a source of blessing and not a curse to humanity'. (207)

As the Anglican reviewer mentioned in the quote above, not all British citizens saw the Catholic Church as the antithesis of the Anglican community. Some authors of the *fin de siècle* used their Gothic novels to point out the numerous common enemies held by both the Catholic and Anglican Churches, including superstitions found in both religious establishments, as shown in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

ESCAPING THE BLACK MAGIC OF EASTERN RELIGION

With the possible exception of Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), the most popular novel of Gothic horror and blood is undoubtedly Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). *Dracula* stands today as the bible of vampire literature, and in her work *Dracula: Between Tradition and Modernism*, Carol Senf writes, "The sheer number of works with 'Dracula' in their title tempts me to argue that no other single work, with the exception of the Bible, has so influenced Anglo-American culture" (7). While Senf's analysis may be a slight exaggeration of the importance of *Dracula*, it still does well to suggest the extent of the novel's influence. Dozens of film versions of the novel exist today, the first having been produced in the early 1920s,¹ and Senf remarks that *Dracula* "has never been out of print in English, and it has been translated into numerous foreign languages" (13). Not only has the adult world been affected, but Count Dracula has even worked his way into the world of children, showing up as the humorous "Count Chocula" on cereal boxes and the lovable "Count van Count" in *Sesame Street*.

The initial critical acclaim of *Dracula* was not due to its ability to horrify, although the novel is one of the most horrifying books ever written. Instead, *Dracula* claimed and maintained its critical popularity due to the questions it raised about Victorian cultural issues. According to Senf, "Understanding *Dracula* . . . provides insights into Stoker's times, including insights about changing standards of sexual behavior, the broader roles allotted to women, the place of England in the world, and the impact of science and technology on the world. Indeed, *Dracula* is a veritable mirror of fin de siècle [*sic*] beliefs" (7). For the past ninety years, *Dracula* critics have focused

primarily on the issues of sexuality and femininity found within the text, examining the characters of Lucy Westenra and Mina (Murray) Harker down to the last intimate detail. But one of the long ignored tenets of the novel is its explicit religious nature. In his article titled “Vampire Religion,” Christopher Herbert writes that “[t]he strong religious thrust of this novel has . . . been ignored, not to say suppressed, in recent criticism” (100). A quick glance at any *Dracula* bibliography shows that Herbert’s statement is true. Using the *Journal of Dracula Studies* as an example, recent articles have included “‘Betwixt Sunset and Sunrise’: Liminality in *Dracula*” (2005), “The Use of Count Famous in ‘Buffy vs. Dracula’” (2006), and “The Children of the Night: Stoker’s Dreadful Reading and the Plot of *Dracula*” (2006).² The topics of blood, sex, decadence, HIV, science, and the New Woman are amply covered in the numerous articles written in the past few years, but issues of religious allegory and Catholicism within the novel have been neglected.

Stoker was no stranger to the disunity that existed between Christian denominations in the 1890s. As a resident of Dublin for thirty years and manager of the Lyceum Theatre in London for over twenty-seven years, Stoker knew the religious tensions that strained relations within his country. Throughout his life, Ireland was fighting for its political and religious autonomy from the British crown, causing extensive strife between the Protestant denominations and the Catholic parishes. Additionally, the ever-growing Methodist and Presbyterian movements disliked both the Papal authorities who existed in Ireland and the ritualism within the Established Church, which greatly resembled the Catholic rites. Although Stoker was a baptized and practicing member of the Anglican Church,³ he strongly believed that Protestants and Catholics should learn to

set aside religious differences and live together peaceably.⁴ To Stoker, the ideas of redemption and salvation through Christ were more important than what he perceived to be trivial arguments about doctrinal variations.

In Stoker's fifth novel, *Dracula*, the characters manage to battle a common enemy in spite of their different Church affiliations. Jonathan Harker, one of the novel's main characters, claims to be an "English Churchman" (9), while Van Helsing is acknowledged to be a Roman Catholic by most characters in the novel.⁵ Most of the other major characters within the novel adhere to the doctrines of the Anglican Church (with the notable exception being the American, Quincey Morris, who seems to have no religion). However, the characters do not begin the story with a perfect acceptance of the opposing Church's religious view. Harker gives the most concrete example of his prejudice against the Catholic Church early in the novel. When speaking of the crucifix offered to him by a Transylvanian woman, Harker remarks, "I had been taught to regard such things as in some measure idolatrous . . . She saw, I suppose, the doubt in my face, for she put the rosary round my neck" (9).⁶ Harker's hesitance to accept the crucifix points to his inner distaste for Catholic symbolism, an attitude shared by many members of the Anglican community.⁷ Nevertheless, Harker is able to overcome this displeasure of ritualism and symbolism when he understands the common enemy shared by him, an Anglican, and his companion Van Helsing, a Catholic.

The religious undertones of the novel are meaningless without a common religious enemy for both sects, embodied by the horrific King Vampire. The plot of the entire novel circulates around understanding and destroying the vampire Dracula, so a complete understanding of his character reveals the purpose of the entire novel. Perhaps

far too obvious is the fact that Dracula holds citizenship in Transylvania, a country which seems to be one of the most isolated of all the Eastern European countries.⁸ To the English of Stoker's age, Transylvania represented the mystic East. To those who knew nothing of Transylvania, the dark forests, tragic mountains, and haunting black clouds that Stoker describes in detail would strike terror in the heart and point clearly to a Gothic "other-world" or a "not-England." Even Dracula points out this separation between countries, saying to Harker, "We are in Transylvania; and Transylvania is not England. Our ways are not your ways, and there shall be to you many strange things" (29). An aura of mystery prevails in this passage, as in the descriptions of the landscape. As an Englishman, Harker is confused by the strange nature of the howling wolves and floating blue flames of Transylvania because he is unable to justify these events in his rational English mindset.

Additionally, the Christian religion of Dracula's Transylvanian and surrounding areas derives primarily from the Eastern Orthodox Church, not the Roman Catholic Church, a detail which points to the image of Dracula as an agent of superstition. Leonard Wolf in his preface to *The Essential Dracula* calls the folklore and superstitions of Transylvania "Gothic enough" (xiv), a statement that can also be used in connection with its religion. While the Catholic Church, well known to the citizens of England, has always prided itself on emphasizing the rationality of Christianity, the Orthodox Church gives more weight to the mysticism of Christianity, which leads to an increase in superstitions about the Evil One and the surrounding world. If the ways of God cannot be fully explained to man, then equally inexplicable are the ways of Satan. Also, the smallest natural event, when viewed in a mystic light, can become religious and

horrifying, such as the act of a bat flying into a window or the blue refraction of light off a puddle of water. While the Eastern Orthodox Church does not encourage superstitious beliefs or practices, Christian mysticism can easily turn into un-Christian superstitions when allowed to develop in isolation from the Mother church and apart from biblical teachings, both conditions found in Transylvania.

Not surprisingly, the isolation of Transylvania, combined with its high level of unexplained mysticism, allowed for the development of superstitious beliefs about the dead and Un-Dead. Transylvania lies in a region that had been associated with vampire lore and superstitions about the dead long before the creation of *Dracula*. Although Katarina Wilson, a distinguished professor of comparative literature at the University of Georgia, claims that “[l]ike the legend of the living dead, so the origin of the word ‘vampire’ is clouded in mystery,” she also provides support for the argument that the term originated in one of the Serbian or Slavic languages of Eastern Europe (577-578). She writes, “Miklosich, a late nineteenth-century Austrian linguist, suggests . . . that the word ‘vampire’ and its Slavic synonyms ‘upior,’ ‘uper,’ and ‘upyr’ are all derivatives of the Turkish ‘uber’ – witch” (577), again connecting the origin of vampire with the East.⁹ When Harker searches his dictionary for the different words that the Transylvanians use in connection with *Dracula*, he notes both the word “witch” and the word “vampire”:

“[They called him] ‘stregoica’ – witch, ‘vrolok’ and ‘vlkoslak’ – both of which mean the same thing one being Slovak [Slavic] and the other Servian [*sic*] for something that is either were-wolf or vampire” (10). Once again, the word “vampire” is connected with the idea of a witch, a connection that originated in the languages of Eastern Europe. The lore and the language of the land point intrinsically to an ancient aversion to those who

rise out of graves, as well as a standing association of vampires with dark magic.

But Dracula is not just a supporter of the superstitions and old traditions; he owes his existence to them. As a vampire, Dracula can exist only in a culture that fears the unknown and holds the supernatural in awe, a culture such as that of Transylvania. Harker realizes this fact when he writes, "It [Transylvania] is nineteenth century up-to-date with a vengeance. And yet, unless my senses deceive me, the old centuries had, and have, powers of their own which mere 'modernity' cannot kill" (50). The powers to which Harker refers are the powers of age-old superstitions that render the rational modern man helpless against himself, powers that he sees within Dracula and the country of Transylvania. Herbert concurs with this idea: "The evil Count is above all an emanation of the world of superstition" (101). If Stoker's novel is analyzed metaphorically, as Herbert has done within his quote, Dracula becomes more than a member of the Un-Dead. Instead, Dracula becomes the embodiment of superstition and a justification for the irrationality of human fear. According to one source, Pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758) "realized that the belief in vampires was firmly rooted in ancient superstition" and condemned those who practiced the "mutilation of corpses believed to be vampires" (Wilson 582). What Pope Benedict realized in the mid-1700s is what Stoker condemns in the late 1800s: superstitions that drive a man to outrageous and often inhuman lengths. As Dracula moves closer to England, he brings with him the ancient superstitions, corrupting the Christianized nation with every step upon British soil.

The use of a vampire as the antagonist brings its own unique religious implications to the Catholic overtones within the novel. Just as vampires are seen as a type of dark, demonic energy, so also many vampire legends claim that the Un-Dead are

human souls who have committed damnable or eternal sins.¹⁰ Wolf mentions within a footnote, “[A]ccording to folk tradition, suicides . . . risked turning into vampires” (32). But the vampire can also spread its demonic evil through its poisonous bite, dragging the soul of the innocent victim to hell alongside those who committed eternal sins. Van Helsing agrees with this idea when he says, “No longer she [Lucy] is the devil’s Un-Dead. She is God’s true dead, whose soul is with Him” (264). As an Anglican who had been given a proper Christian burial, Lucy should have gained admittance into heaven at her death. Instead, Van Helsing implies that Lucy’s condemned, vampiric body traps her soul on earth rather than allowing it to be released to God. Even though Lucy committed no eternal sin, the bite of the vampire damned her with “the curse of immortality” (261).

However, the redemption of a damned soul within the novel raises an interesting theological problem. The text describes the eyes of both Lucy and Dracula in similar terms. Dr. Seward indicates that the eyes were “Lucy’s eyes in form and colour; but Lucy’s eyes unclean and full of hell-fire” (257), while Harker writes that “[Dracula’s] eyes blazed with a sort of demoniac fury” (35). Both sets of eyes burn with the fires of hell, as the devil possesses both souls. But unlike Lucy, Dracula is never offered salvation, nor do the characters of the book attempt to redeem him. Although later passages within the work shed a pitiful light upon the Count’s bachelor-like lifestyle,¹¹ no attempts are made to kill Dracula in his sleep and redeem him from the gates of Hell, as are made for Lucy. The only rational explanation for this belief is that after centuries of blood-sucking and child murder, Dracula’s soul is thought to be beyond salvation. But by the time that Van Helsing and the others drive the stake through Lucy’s heart, she too has committed a damnable sin: unrepented murder. Van Helsing states that Lucy is not

responsible for her actions because “she was in a trance” or under the control of Dracula (246), so her soul can still receive salvation, offering an all-to-easy solution to the problem of Lucy’s soul. For Van Helsing, Lucy’s innocence while at rest shows the innocence of her soul and the purity of her Christian baptism. For this reason, Lucy must be killed while she sleeps and not while she hunts. Dracula, on the other hand, must simply be killed.

The members of the hunting party do not seek to kill Dracula because he is a menace to society, or even because of the wrongs he has done to their women. Instead, they seek the vampire because it is their duty as Christians to hunt and kill the Un-Dead. Van Helsing describes their hunt in these terms:

[I]t is a terrible task that we undertake . . . For if we fail in this our fight he [Dracula] must surely win: and then where end we? . . . But to fail here, is not mere life or death. It is that we become as him; that we henceforward become foul things of the night like him – without heart or conscience, preying on the bodies and the souls of those we love best. To us for ever are the gates of heaven shut . . . We go on for all time abhorred by all; a blot on the face of God’s sunshine; an arrow in the side of Him who died for man. But we are face to face with duty; and in such case must we shrink? For me, I say, no[.] (287-288)

As Van Helsing explains, vampires are a curse and a thorn to God, unwelcome both in heaven and on earth. As a Christian, Van Helsing believes it his duty to hunt and kill the vampires, if only as an act of charity for those whom the vampire might bite. Although the party is able to redeem the souls of the created Un-Dead, as is seen with Lucy, they

cannot live forever and continually battle Dracula in that manner. After the infection of Mina Harker, Van Helsing is more insistent on the cleansing of vampiric evil as a Christian duty, so that Mina's soul may be redeemed.

Dracula, then, serves as a picture of both Satan and the anti-Christ, planting seeds of superstition in the unsuspecting souls of the citizens of London, while inflecting the blood of the innocent with a mystical, dark evil. As with the devil himself, Dracula stands at his door and welcomes his guests into his lair: "Welcome to my house! Enter freely and of your own will!" (23). This statement resonates back to the folklore of witches, who are unable to cross the threshold of a home unless invited by the owner. In an inverse of this idea, Dracula is able to spread evil and superstition only if his victims choose to enter of their own free will.

Additionally, Dracula has the power to silence his enemies through fear. When first entering Transylvania, Harker writes, "When I asked him [the innkeeper] if he knew Count Dracula, and could tell me anything of his castle, both he and his wife crossed themselves, and, saying that they knew nothing at all, simply refused to speak further" (7). When asked direct questions about the devil-figure, the couple cross themselves against the evil eye as their tongues become frozen with fear. Many of the citizens of Transylvania react the same way, pretending to not understand Harker's broken German when he asks questions about Dracula and crossing themselves at the mention of the vampire. The fear that Dracula rightfully strikes into the hearts of the townsfolk is similar to the fear that will assault those whom the anti-Christ afflicts. Additionally, Dracula strikes fear into his servant Renfield, who Dr. Steward notices is unable to speak the word "drink" after Dracula's visit with the madman (324). Dracula does not wish for

his attempts on Mina to be revealed, and he silences Renfield in order to protect his vampiric blood habits. While the anti-Christ figuratively silences the Church in the book of Revelation, Dracula literally silences the Church through fear and, when pressed, through blood-sucking and death.

When Dracula is viewed in such a demonic light, Renfield's necessity within the novel then becomes obvious. He is not a madman used by Stoker to disgust the audience, although he does fulfill that role. Instead, he acts as a herald of the coming Destructor. He is the false prophet in the wilderness, preparing the way for his Master, Dracula. Several times throughout the novel, Renfield points to his own position as herald, claiming that "the Master is at hand" (132), while attempting to explain to Dr. Seward the destruction that Dracula will wrought upon England. After meeting Dracula for the first time and kneeling before his Master, Renfield exclaims, "I am here to do Your bidding, Master. I am Your slave, and You will reward me, for I shall be faithful. I have worshipped You long and afar off. Now that You are near, I await Your commands" (135). Renfield places himself in the position of Dracula's servant, a minor demon who huddles in the awesome shadow of evil. Renfield intends to carry out Dracula's every wish, despite Renfield's pleas to Dr. Steward that his soul hangs in a moral balance. Nevertheless, Renfield is the willing servant of Satan and the anti-Christ, formulating Dracula into a madman's God.

Within every Christian allegory, the forces of good must also exist. Van Helsing serves as a Christ figure for most of the story, mentoring and leading his group of "disciples" through their fight against the prince of the air. Lord Godalming, Dr. Steward, and the Harkers all submit to the authority of Van Helsing's knowledge. Even

Lucy realizes Van Helsing's saving powers. Like the thief on the cross asking for paradise, in death Lucy cries to Van Helsing, "[G]ive me peace" (202). Dr. Steward also speaks of Van Helsing displaying the sign of Christianity to the deceased Lucy, stating that Van Helsing "took from his neck, inside his collar, a little gold crucifix, and placed it over the mouth [of Lucy]" (207). The crucifix comes from the place of Van Helsing's heart, symbolizing the outpouring of love and Christian compassion to Lucy. Van Helsing knows prior to this moment that Lucy's soul is damned, but he still attempts to redeem her from the gates of hell by bestowing upon her the sign of the cross, the same way that Jesus sought to redeem mankind through the symbolic cross of Calvary.

As a Christ figure, Van Helsing goes so far as to preach the biblical parables to the British disciples. When discussing the issue of Lucy's health, Van Helsing uses the parable of the seed to illustrate his stance: "[Y]ou do not find the good husbandman dig up his planted corn to see if he grow; that is for children who play at husbandry, and not for those who take it as of the work of their life . . . I have sowed my corn, and Nature has her work to do in making it sprout; if he sprout at all, there's some promise" (157). He intends to illustrate to Dr. Steward that the health of Lucy is now in the hands of Nature, much as Jesus illustrated that the health of the seed depended on the condition the soul, but the parable does not make sense to the doctor. Instead, the parable confuses the doctor, and Van Helsing is required to explain his meaning in exact scientific terms. Later on, when discussing the necessity of hunting the King Vampire, Van Helsing declares, "[O]nce our feet are on the ploughshare, we must not draw back" (265). This statement echoes the words Jesus used to describe the act of seeking after the kingdom of heaven: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the

kingdom of God” (Luke 9.62). But while Jesus’ parables enlightened his disciples about the concepts of salvation and heaven, Van Helsing’s parable expresses the need for perseverance in spiritual warfare. His parables and sayings either do not clarify the abstract idea, as with the first example, or warp Jesus’ original intention, as with the latter example. Regardless, he is unsuccessful in his usage of Jesus’ tool of ministry.

The clear dichotomy between good and evil in *Dracula* leads to the conflict between ancient superstitions (vampire) and Christian existence. In a purely allegorical Christian world, superstition cannot live equally in the same country as a living faith. When read as an allegory, the conflict between Dracula and Van Helsing must end with the death of one party because the people of England “cannot serve two masters” (Matt. 6.24). Van Helsing names his dualistic enemy, vampire / superstition, claiming, “[T]he things – tradition and superstition – are everything. Does not the belief in vampires rest for others . . . on them?” (289). The infectious nature of superstition is why Van Helsing remains in England even after Lucy’s death. He does not trivialize his enemy; Van Helsing is well studied in the psychological sciences and the paranormal, and he gives Dracula credit for being both crafty and wise. But ultimately, Van Helsing relies on the powers of the crucifix and the Host to neutralize his enemy. Van Helsing has knowledge of evil, but he chooses instead to rely on faith to bring salvation.

In his role as Christ the Savior, Van Helsing attempts to bring true salvation and faith to the British by driving out the superstition brought in by Dracula. Helsing reemphasizes this fact when he states, “We have on our side power of combination – a power denied to the vampire kind; we have sources of science; we are free to act and think . . . In fact, so far as our powers extend, they are unfettered, and we are free to use

them. We have self-devotion in a cause, and an end to achieve which is not a selfish one” (288-89).¹² The first part of this sentence speaks to the idea of Christian strength in numbers: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I [Jesus] in the midst of them” (Matt. 18.20). Also, Van Helsing points toward the rationality of the Catholic religion, noting that mankind has a free will to serve good or evil, while the damned can only do what it evil. Lastly, he mentions self-devotion to the cause and an unselfish end, pointing toward a Christian who “runs with patience the race that is set before” (Heb. 12.1) and believes that “the greatest of these is charity” (1 Cor. 13.13). Within Van Helsing’s creed, superstitions become mere irrationalities that can be either explained by science or destroyed through might.

In killing Dracula at the end of the novel, Van Helsing and his disciples in fact kill the tendency for the incorporation of superstition and dark magic into religion. Stoker was greatly concerned by the increasing “spirituality” of England and the decreasing belief in the authority of the Christian Church. Like many concerned religious citizens, he was troubled by the hypocrisy of church-going Christians. The increased dependence on mediums to interpret the will of the spirits showed Stoker the spiritual desperation and hopelessness that had overcome many of Britain’s Christians at the end of the century. For Stoker, Dracula becomes the physical embodiment of these spirits, as he stands eternally dead and eternally spirit on earth. He embodies the superstitious nature of the British working class, resurrecting the bodies of the dead to haunt the world and, under his mastery, bring terror to London. Van Helsing, who shares the author’s first name, served as the ideal embodiment of a concerned British citizen, willing to fight against the “darkness of the world” (Eph. 6.12). Van Helsing and his followers fight the

darkness of superstition with the symbols of the Catholic Church, with the Host and the Crucifix; in the end, they purify the land and mark England as God's land, a purification that the superstitious and spiritualistic England of the 1890s so desperately needed.

While a religious reading of *Dracula* lends a new dimension to this already deep narrative, several troubling theological issues arise when the novel is examined at length. Herbert writes, "Most significant of all, a series of passages instructs readers to interpret the tale not just in accordance with a broadly ecumenical religious spirit but in particular theological terms" (101). What particular theological terms Herbert saw within *Dracula*, however, stands to be debated. Despite the triumph of the Christians at the end of the novel, the Catholic Church is sorely misrepresented throughout the novel. As footnoted by Wolf throughout *The Essential Dracula*, Van Helsing's flippant desecration of the Host has long upset devout Catholics, as his usage of the Host reflects the Anglican belief that the "bread" is an earthly symbol of the Body of Christ, not the Catholic belief that the Host is the literal Body of Christ and cannot be allowed to disintegrate or be trodden under foot (a mortal sin). In other instances as well, Stoker confuses Catholic theology with the general Anglican theology of the day, perhaps because the Anglican Church itself was confused as to what, as a denomination, it believed.¹³ Additionally, Stoker raises troubling questions about eternal sin and the nature of spiritual warfare that are never quite answered within the text.

Despite these issues, Stoker seems to push his readers toward an acceptance of the Catholic Church as the only way to gain salvation from dark magic. Through his use of Gothic horrors and popular literary devices, Stoker is able to present a thoroughly pro-Catholic work to an anti-Catholic society. But unwilling to look below the surface of the

novel and into their country's own religious turmoil, many Britons avoided direct criticism of the religious elements within the novel. Senf cites an 1897 review of the novel when she writes, "Contemporary reviews, although they recognized that *Dracula* was more powerful than Stoker's earlier works, were not inclined to examine why it exerted such a hold on them and were more likely to take it at face value as a horror story—as did the *Punch* reviewer who compared the novel to *Faust*" (13). Through his use of the Gothic genre, Stoker presents the terrifying truth about superstition and the occult to a people living in the shadows of doubt and agnosticism, pointing out again the hope offered through faith in Jesus Christ.

Despite the success of Stoker's novel and its concern with eastern superstitions within Christianity, some Britons were unwilling to view either the Catholic Church or the Anglican Church as the means to salvation and earthly happiness. Nor did these citizens turn to spiritualism as a means of personal enlightenment. These Britons instead found their salvation in the extensive materialism of the *fin de siècle*, worshipping the beauty of the physical world as a god in its own right. However, the worship of beauty (aestheticism) led to a unique set of religious implications and problems, as Oscar Wilde would exemplify both through his life and in his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

CHAPTER FIVE
TO THE VAIN GODS OF BEAUTY AND ART

Religion in the late Victorian period was not limited to the Established Church of England or the Holy Catholic Church, both highlighted in previous chapters. Some artists and critics, such as Oscar Wilde, attempted to create their own form of unestablished religion. These religions usually incorporated a sense of religious morality with some type of hedonism or utilitarianism, but they always rejected one or more of the major premises of the mainstream churches. In the case of Wilde, he sought to create a “religion” that allowed for his open homosexuality (then considered to be a mortal sin by both the Church of England and the Catholic Church), but that also retained the idea of a moral and just God.¹ As Richard Ellmann put it in his biography, “Wilde writes his works out of a debate between doctrines [Catholic and Anglican] rather than out of doctrine” (*Oscar Wilde* 99). For years, Wilde struggled with issues of sin, morality, and the soul, equally weighing the lighter side of the issues with the psychological aspects, as well as contrasting the Catholic perspective with the Anglican. Perhaps no work is more concerned with the dark, troubling struggle between the soul and the body than is his only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

The history behind the publication of *Dorian Gray* is quite interesting, as full of scandal and intrigue as the life of the author. By the time of *Dorian Gray*'s publication in 1890, Oscar Wilde had already achieved infamy in England and America, as both a lecturer and an author. He was known in American newspapers as an “effeminate dandy,” the main proponent of the aesthetic movement, and an outspoken socialist. By the mid-1880s, speculations about Wilde's sexuality flooded through London's high

society, even after his marriage to Constantine Lloyd in 1884. Even though the novel followed in the steps of popular reemerging Gothic tale, these social speculations affected Wilde's ability to publish *Dorian Gray*, especially given the story's original homoerotic language and portrayal of the darker sides of human nature.

In 1889, American editor J. M. Stoddart of *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* (Philadelphia) was touring London, scouting for new stories, when he met Wilde and requested that the author contribute a story to the magazine. Wilde agreed, and in June of 1890 a short version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* appeared as the lead story in *Lippincott's*. The story, with its strong love relationship between Basil and Dorian, immediately upset critics and the public alike, both in America and in England. Wilde was little affected by the outraged critics, sending humorous replies to those newspapers that published angry letters to the editor. However, when Wilde rewrote *Dorian Gray*, he did take some advice from the critics. In addition to nearly six chapters of additions, he also tamed much of the homoerotic language within the novel. The new, expanded version included for the first time Wilde's aesthetic *Preface* and was published in 1891 by Ward, Lock, and Co. of London, to slightly less outrage than met the first publication.² This expanded version, not the earlier publication from *Lippincott's*, continues to be in circulation today and is the edition most often used in classrooms.³

Wilde was particularly fond of using allegories and fairy tales, especially dark and horrific ones, within his writings in order to present a point. He even produced two collections of "fairy tales," fashioned partially after Charles Lutwidge Dodgson's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), of which Wilde was quite fond. Some of the stories, such as "The Selfish Giant," have very strong Christian metaphorical readings, and nearly

all the stories criticize some aspect of London society. As with Dodgson's earlier work, children enjoyed Wilde's stories for their exaggerated characters, while the adult audience saw the darker social meanings within the pieces. Although most contemporary critics mistook the novel for a realistic fiction, *Dorian Gray* was meant to be read in the same metaphorical light as Wilde's fairy tales. In his 1974 work *Into the Demon Universe*, Christopher S. Nassar calls *Dorian Gray*, "[A] partly supernatural tale in which the characters are not individuals but symbols" (37). Even Wilde himself holds to such a claim with his preface to *Dorian Gray*: "All art is at once surface and symbol" (41). In this respect, Wilde uses the well-established "fairy tale" and the Gothic symbol of a man who sells his soul to the devil to criticize the Anglican and Catholic churches, as well as the aesthetic movement of the Age of Decadence.⁴

The one major element that ties *Dorian Gray* to the Gothic novel is that original symbol, the myth of Faust. According to one source, the first Faust stories were published as chapbooks in Germany during the mid-sixteenth century and were quite popular with Protestants and Catholics alike (Wentersdorf 205). These chapbooks first made their way to England during the later years of the sixteenth century, followed by Christopher Marlowe's publication of an English dramatic version of the German myth, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (1604). Despite the availability of an English version, German renditions of the tale would remain popular, with the most well-known being Goethe's *Faust* (Part I: 1808; Part II: 1832).⁵ The story is set in Europe during the early 1500s, where the highly educated Doctor Faustus (or Faust) becomes frustrated with the limits of human power and knowledge; when approached by a devil, Faust chooses to sell his soul in exchange for the service of the devil. But Wilde does not

simply change the setting of the myth from early sixteenth century Europe to London at the *fin de siècle*. Instead, he challenges the very premises on which Faust is based: boundless knowledge and absolute religion.

Primary in every portrayal of Faust is a thirst after unlimited knowledge. Very early in the tale, Faust makes a pact with Mephistopheles (a human embodiment of the devil) for unlimited knowledge and power. To gain Mephistopheles's help, Faust offers his soul in exchange for an eternity of omnipotence and omniscience. Mephistopheles agrees; however, a condition is placed on the agreement. If Faust ever wishes to remain permanently in one moment of joy, his soul will be forever lost to the devil. Faust agrees, and he signs the pact with his own blood. After the deal is made, Mephistopheles provides for Faust all the pleasures of the world, hoping to find the one pleasure that will cause Faust to break his pact, thus damning his soul to hell.

Similar to Faust in this most primary respect, Dorian too seeks expanded human knowledge. Early sections of the novel imply that he has been well educated by his grandfather, and Aunt Agatha claims that he is an accomplished violinist and pianist (75). But even at the start of the novel, Dorian is limited in his search for knowledge by his own innocence about the world. He is young and slightly naïve, but not a schoolboy and by no means uneducated. Completely enthralled by ideals and philanthropy, Dorian has a skewed perception of the real world. Upon first meeting the boy, Lord Henry claims, "There was something in [Dorian's] face that made one trust him all at once. All the candour of youth was there, as well as youth's passionate purity. One felt that he had kept himself unspotted from the world" (57). As Lord Henry observes and the portrait later proclaims, Dorian is as innocent as a beautiful young child who has not yet

experienced the world. This inexperience greatly inhibits the young man's ability to gain knowledge.

But Dorian's innocence is quickly challenged by the devil in the first chapters of the novel. When Dorian first meets his "'devil,' the aesthetic critic Lord Henry" (Potet 245), the young man gives great heed to the words of the older gentleman. The artist Basil Hallward, having known Lord Henry for many years, understands that the lord believes only in the power of beauty, and thus is critical of anything that lacks perfection. Despite Basil's warning to not "pay attention to what Lord Henry says" because "[h]e has a very bad influence over all his friends" (Wilde 58), Dorian is drawn to the "bad influence" of Lord Henry because he sees in the lord a type of mental clarity and depth of knowledge that the younger man does not possess. When, during this scene, Lord Henry "[shoots] an arrow into the air" and reveals to Dorian the nature of beauty and self-fulfillment that was clouded by childhood (60), Dorian realizes how limited his view of the world has been. He is awakened, able to recognize both the frailty of his soul and the internal beauty within his painting, but is unsure of what to do with this new knowledge.⁶

But Dorian has another devil within his story in addition to Lord Henry. Unlike Faust, who sought out the devil through alchemy and magic, Dorian sells his soul to the devil within a portrait's frame without even realizing it. Ellmann concurs, claiming that "Dorian sells his soul . . . in the ambiguous form of his portrait, to art" ("Romantic" 353). Even Dorian seems to realize this fact immediately upon seeing the portrait:

"How sad it is," murmured Dorian . . . "How sad it is. I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young. It will never be older than this particular day of June.... If it were only the

other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that – for that – I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!” (65-6)

Already, Dorian is enamored by his reflection in the picture. He sees the perfect beauty of youth and wishes forever to possess it. In only a few words, Dorian has exchanged his innocent soul for everlasting youth. Art and beauty have stolen his soul, but Dorian seems little to regret that fact.

From this point onward, Lord Henry fulfills the role of demon on earth by introducing Dorian to the different pleasures of life. Becoming Lord Henry's one man who were “to live out his life fully and completely” and “to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream” (59), Dorian sets out to experience the world in new ways. But his first experience comes through his own efforts, not through the guidance of Lord Henry. While wandering through the streets inhabited by London's less fortunate citizens, Dorian enters a theatre on a whim and falls in love with the poor-born actress Sibyl Vane. As Dorian recounts his “love story” to Lord Henry, though, it becomes obvious that Dorian has fallen in love with his romanticized view of Sibyl as an actress, not the real Sibyl of London. He can describe her only in terms of the theatre, as Juliet, Rosalind, or Ophelia; he calls her “a born actress,” saying that he “left her in the forest of Arden [and] shall find her in an orchard in Verona” (113). Never is he able to describe what Sibyl is apart from her art. As with his portrait earlier, Dorian falls in love with beauty and art. However, he is unable to reconcile beauty with reality, and when Sibyl puts on a poor performance at the theatre, giving up her art for life as

Dorian's wife, he is disillusioned. He comments to Basil, "I wish she [Sibyl] were ill . . . but she seems to me to be simply callous and cold. She has entirely altered. Last night she was a great artist. This evening she is merely a commonplace, mediocre actress" (121). To Sibyl, he says, "Without your art you are nothing" (124). In his blind devotion to aesthetics, he manages to reject Sibyl and to drive her to suicide.

However, Dorian is not unaffected by his cruelty or his first love's death. Initially, he feels guilt without even knowing of her fate. The effect of his insensitive act shows as "lines of cruelty round the mouth" of his portrait (126), which shocks him. At this time, Dorian realizes that his soul is within the portrait, changing and morphing with each sin he commits. After he learns of Sibyl's death, Dorian's grief increases. But in the young man's grief, Lord Henry reminds Dorian of the true aesthetic attitude that he should take:

The girl never really lived, and so she has never really died. To you at least she was always a dream, a phantom that flitted through Shakespeare's plays and left them lovelier for its presence, a reed through which Shakespeare's music sounded richer and more full of joy. The moment she touched actual life, she marred it, and it marred her, and so she passed away. Mourn for Ophelia, if you like. Put ashes on your head because Cordelia was strangled. Cry out against Heaven because the daughter of Brabantio died. But don't waste your tears over Sibyl Vane. She was less real than they are. (138)

Lord Henry, attuned to the religion of aesthetics that Dorian is seeking to learn, realizes that art is more important than the artist. As the personal life of the artist is twice

removed from the beauty of art, life is less real than art or the artist. As Lord Henry explains to Dorian, Sibyl was only real when she was a piece of art.

However, the day after the discovery of Sibyl's death, Dorian still feels remorse both over his actions toward his first love and about his ever-changing portrait. To displace his fears about the horrid picture, Dorian has it moved to his locked schoolroom on the upper floor of the family's mansion. But more importantly, as he is moving the portrait, he writes to Lord Henry to send along some reading material in order to distract Dorian from the ugliness of life. The "yellow book" that Lord Henry sends along reveals to Dorian the extent of sin in the world around him: "It seemed to him that in exquisite raiment, and to the delicate sound of flutes, the sins of the world were passing in dumb show before him. Things that he had dimly dreamed of were suddenly made real to him. Things of which he had never dreamed were gradually revealed" (158-9). This book, with its glorification of sin and aesthetics, changes Dorian's view of the world. Suddenly, he realizes hedonistic sins of which he never dreamed or dimly imagined.

After the revelation of the "yellow book," Dorian's view of pleasure and fulfillment is radically changed. Toward the middle of the novel, Dorian blatantly states that "there was to be, as Lord Henry prophesied, a new [h]edonism that was to re-create life, and to save it from that harsh, uncomely [P]uritanism that is having, in our own day, its curious revival" (164). Not only does Dorian accept this new hedonism, but he also seeks to install it as the religion of fashionable London, rather than allow the radical "Puritanism" of the Evangelicals and the Low Anglican Church.⁷ Rather than abide by the strict moral code that dictated Victorian life, he showed to his counterparts and the youth of London that pleasures should be derived from beauty and art. He begins by

studying all religions and science, seeking elements in each one that might work in his aesthetic hedonism:

It was rumored of him [(Dorian)] once that he was about to join the Roman Catholic communion; and certainly the Roman ritual had always a great attraction for him . . . But he never fell into the error of arresting his intellectual development by any formal acceptance of creed or system . . . Mysticism, with its marvelous power of making common things strange to us, and the subtle antinomianism that always seems to accompany it, moved him for a season; and for a season he inclined to the materialistic doctrines of the *Darwinismus* [Darwinism] movement in Germany, and found a curious pleasure in tracing the thoughts and passions of men to some pearly cell in the brain. (165-6)

But while the studies of established religion and science both have their lures, Dorian is not willing to sacrifice his lust after knowledge and beauty for a system of belief that would restrict what he could study and accept as truth. He wishes to know everything and be limited by nothing, thus his religion is also governed by the premise that humanity must be ruled by desires, not by laws.

However, temporary search for knowledge does not lead to power for Dorian as it did for Faust, nor is it the ultimate end in his life. Instead, beauty reigns supreme over knowledge, and the study and appreciation of art lead to an increase in intellect. The idea of beauty as a religion may seem impossible to some, but the excessive materialism of the Victorian period screamed for such a connection. Ornate wood carvings, meticulous stained glass windows, and exquisite interior buttresses inhabited nearly every Anglican

Church of the period as the Gothic Revival in architecture swept through England. The clothes that one wore to Sunday services, especially those dresses imported from Paris, had more significance in many Victorian parishes than did the message of the vicar. For the late Victorians, “[religious] faith becomes aesthetics” (Gilley 324), and the line between the study of beauty and the worship of beauty is very thin. With Dorian, the study of beauty is essentially also its worship.

Dorian preaches his religion of aesthetics, claiming that the worship of the senses should be aimed “at making them [the senses] elements of a new spirituality, of which a fine instinct for beauty was to be the dominant characteristic” (164). For one to develop a “fine instinct for beauty,” as is essential in this belief system, one must become educated in the fine arts and perfect forms of beauty. In Dorian’s religion of sensuality and aesthetics, beauty is made god, and the senses become Jesus Christ, a means of gaining access to beauty and worthy of worship within themselves. Dorian tries to place Lord Henry into the role prophet and leader, formulating his beliefs not from his own convictions, but from the beliefs of his mentor. But Lord Henry does not wish to fulfill the role of prophet. Ellmann states that by this point in the novel, “Dorian, falling under Lord Henry’s Mephistophelean tutelage, takes seriously what Lord Henry takes lightly” (“Romantic” 353). Dorian seeks to create the religion he believes his mentor is preaching, without realizing that Lord Henry takes nothing in life seriously.

Dorian’s desire after the beautiful grants him a great deal of power over the men of London. His passion for self-beauty allows him to quiet rooms and to govern men: “Men who talked grossly became silent when Dorian Gray entered the room. There was something in the purity of his face that rebuked them. His mere presence seemed to

recall to them the memory of the innocence that they had tarnished” (161-2).

Additionally, his gathering of beautiful effects and musicians allowed him to open his home to the elite of London, cultivating their idea of the arts. These parties that he hosted “were noted as much for the careful selection and placing of those invited, as for the exquisite taste shown in the decoration of the table, with its subtle symphonic arrangements of exotic flowers, and embroidered clothes, and antique plate of gold and silver” (162-3). True to his aesthetic beliefs, Dorian entices his company with beautiful table settings, as well as talented musicians and enlightened company, entralling their senses with beautiful smells and sounds.

Although Dorian is concerned with cultivating the aesthetic sense of his city, he is more concerned with his own hedonism. Like Faust with his desires toward earthly delights, Dorian moves from one beautiful pleasure to the next, always seeking the most exquisite art available on earth, because “[h]e saw that there was no mood of the mind that had not its counterpart in the sensuous life” (167). With the wisdom of his yellow Bible, Dorian capitalizes on the subtleties of his sense. To cultivate his sense of smell, Dorian researches different oils and perfumes of the world, each invoking its own mood. To music he also gives his attention, opening his house to both performers of the classics and “grave yellow-shawled Tunisians pluck[ing] at the strained strings of monstrous lutes” (167). But perhaps most fascinating is Dorian’s extensive love of beautiful gems and jewels. He boasts a collection of rare gems, “such as the olive-green chrysoberyl that turns red by lamplight⁸ . . . rose-pink and wine-yellow topazes⁹ . . . orange and violet spinels,¹⁰ and amethysts with their alternate layers of ruby and sapphire,”¹¹ in addition to “three emeralds of extraordinary size and richness of colour,¹² and . . . a turquoise *de la*

*vieille roche*¹³ that was the envy of all the connoisseurs” (168). Not only is there an air of elegance about this passage, but it also implies a great deal about Dorian’s attention to detail. He has obviously researched his gems thoroughly and thus develops a taste for not the most common gems, but some of the most expensive and rare gems. In this way, Dorian finds pleasure in the visual aspects of the gems’ brilliance, as well as the physical sensation of touch.

Although beauty and the worship of the senses exist in many forms within the covers of *Dorian Gray*, the picture painted by Basil is the central emphasis of the work. Everything is subordinated to the authority of Dorian’s beautiful portrait, making it impossible for him to accept repulsive objects or to allow any un-beautiful person to exist in his presence. This internal repulsion toward the horrible initially pushed Dorian to sell his soul to the devil. When Dorian first sees his painting, he is repulsed. He cries, “I am jealous of everything whose beauty does not die. I am jealous of the portrait you have painted of me. Why should it keep what I must lose?” (66). Dorian sees the perfection of his picture, growing angry at the guarantee of aging. This attraction toward the picture’s beauty causes him to speak rashly, offering his soul in exchange for eternal beauty, as detailed previously. This same attraction toward beauty and repulsion against the ugly leads to his rejection of Sibyl Vane. When he realizes that Sibyl’s acting is “simply bad art” (121), he rejects her as crass and ugly. He uses many of the same terms used earlier by Lord Henry when, during a conversation about poverty in the East End, Lord Henry claims, “It is too ugly, too horrible, too distressing” (79). These are the exact terms Dorian uses to describe the path that his physical beauty would take and the same word he uses to describe Sibyl as she plays her final part upon the stage.

But it is only at the end of the novel that Dorian's obsession with his beautiful picture drives him to madness. After years of devotion to aestheticism, Dorian fails to find satisfaction in his religion of the senses. Instead, as Ellmann claims, "Estheticism [*sic*], embraced as a new gospel, becomes diabolical, just as life, seen as all in all, becomes boring" ("Romantic" 353). What was originally heralded as the new salvation is proven to be nothing more than the façade of the devil. Like Solomon of the Old Testament, Dorian stands at the end of his life crying only, "All is vanity" (Eccles. 1.2). Dorian is unable to remove himself from the presence of his portrait, drawn to and repulsed by his internal ugliness. He sees the damnable state of his soul, even as he continues to blacken it with sin. Near the end of the novel, Lord Henry, the initial agent of evil, asks Dorian, "[W]hat does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose' – how does the quotation run? – 'his own soul'" (243). Dorian, whose soul is damned, registers shock at the remorse and sincerity of the quote, while Lord Henry still only sees the beauty within the quote and asks Dorian to continue on with his piano piece. The quote by Lord Henry causes Dorian to consider his soul again, even as he is troubled by the hopelessness of his pleas.

In desperation and hopelessness, Dorian turns to the God of Christianity (be it Catholic or Anglican), hoping that he has not fallen so far from grace that he cannot be redeemed.¹⁴ Dorian comes to believe that "[n]ot 'Forgive us our sins,' but 'Smite us for our iniquities' should be the prayer of a man to a most just God" (248). Dorian realizes his sins and does not try to escape from them, but instead acknowledges God's condemnation of his decrepit soul. However, acknowledgment of condemnation and confession of sins are two separate acts, a fact of which Dorian would have been made

quite aware during his Catholic studies. He knows that one must confess sins and pay retribution in order for forgiveness to be granted by God. While pondering on his past sins, Dorian reminds himself that “it was his duty to confess, to suffer public shame, and to make public atonement. There was a God who called upon men to tell their sins to earth as well as to heaven. Nothing that he could do would cleanse him till he has told his own sin” (249). This bond between public confession and cleansing cannot be severed, and Dorian understands that one is directly connected to the other.

Nonetheless, there is to be no holy forgiveness for Dorian. Unlike Faust, who eventually manages to reconcile himself to God and gain entrance into heaven, the body of Dorian is left rotting on the floor of his family mansion, with his soul trapped again with his portrait. He understands the necessity of confessing one’s sins to God and paying penitence, but Dorian never does confess. Instead, he thinks, “Confess? Did it mean that he was to confess? . . . He felt that the idea was monstrous” (249). First, Dorian feels that he is justified in keeping his secret. While he has some remorse over the sins of his past, he is not convicted to confess. In addition, he justifies his lack of confession: “Beside, even if he did confess, who would believe him?” (249). As he has done throughout the novel, Dorian decides in the final chapter to master his own sins and become his own Savior. As he drives the knife into the chest of his picture, he kills the image of his sins and his soul, destroying himself in the process.

By allowing Dorian to die by his own hand at the end of the novel, Wilde avoids an ending that he would have seen as blatant hypocrisy. For Wilde, man must always work within a morality, balancing carefully good works with evil ones. Ellmann points out that for Wilde, “[A]estheticism was not a creed but a problem.” He goes on to write

that by the time of the novel's publication, "The slogan of 'art for art's sake' [Wilde] had long since disavowed" (*Oscar Wilde* 310). For Dorian to have confessed his sins and received forgiveness would have been for Wilde, as the author, to have approved of a life of aesthetic pleasures with no remorse. If Wilde did so, he risked destroying his claimed moral of the book: "All excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own punishment . . . Dorian Gray, having led a life of mere sensation and pleasure, tries to kill conscience [God], and at that moment kills himself" (*Letters* 259). While Wilde does not allow God to save Dorian's soul, he also does not allow man to save himself. By the end of the novel, several questions on religion have been raised, but the only answer given is that an imbalanced life leads to moral consequences. Religion still lies in the hands of man, but judgment remains always in the hands of the Almighty God.

CONCLUSION

RELIGIOUS TURMOIL AND LITERARY SOLUTIONS

The Victorian era was, if nothing else, a period of intense Christianity. Even today, “Victorianism” is synonymous with Puritanism, morality, and prudery. In their introduction to *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature*, Knight and Mason write that “despite a divergence of belief and practice among different denominations and traditions, the majority of people in the nineteenth century perceived British culture to be principally Christian” (4). Poems such as Rudyard Kipling’s “The White Man’s Burden” emphasized the Victorian moral obligation for imperializing “uncivilized” cultures, not simply to increase the power of the British Empire, but also to Christianize the un-British parts of the world. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* notes in its introduction to the Victorian Age that “Queen Victoria herself stated that the imperial mission was ‘to protect the poor natives and advance civilization,’” essentially tying imperialization to Christianization (1866). The Victorian middle and upper classes saw it as their Christian duty to educate and “Christianize” the heathens both at home and in the colonies.

However, the same period that gave rise to the largest revival of the Anglican Church in decades also gave rise to the Victorian “crisis of faith,” a term used by critics of the long nineteenth-century to describe the overwhelming conflict between new developments in science and mainstream Christianity. Knight and Mason suggest a possible reason for this “crisis of faith,” citing the changes brought about by the popularization of Darwin (1809-1882) and Huxley’s (1825-1895) theories of evolution, Immanuel Kant’s (1724-1804) dismantling of both revealed and natural theology,¹ and other theories that were rising out of the natural and social sciences of the age:

[P]opular Christian belief [prior to the Victorian period] often relied upon a god-of-the-gaps theology, in which God was used to account for the mysteries of the universe. In the wake of the scientific revolution that took effect in the second half of the nineteenth century, the gaps that God was needed to fill diminished rapidly, and some were left wondering what place belief in God had in the modern world. (157)

The “wondering” that Knight and Mason mention here is the same wondering that drove British Christians, conservative and nominal alike, to justify and defend their shaken faith in God.

The issues that arose at the end of the century eventually led to the belief that scientific knowledge and Christian religious beliefs could not coexist, which in turn led to the secularization of the educational system and a theoretical separation of religious affairs from affairs of the state.² As acknowledged within several critical articles, including Timothy Larsen’s “The Regaining of Faith: Reconversions among Popular Radicals in Mid-Victorian England,” no intelligent individual of the Victorian period was thought to be able to accept the irrationality of orthodox Christianity over the rationality of scientific knowledge:

The notion that the abandonment of religious ideas was the unavoidable fruit of the advancement of knowledge and therefore an irreversible movement was, of course, a component of the propaganda of the Victorian Secularists themselves. As the noted Secularist Robert Cooper put it when Henry Knight, an atheist lecturer at the John Street Institute in London,

converted to Christianity in 1852, “I have some difficulty comprehending how a person can progress *backwards*.” (529-30)

The separation of religion from advancements in knowledge during the mid- to late-Victorian age is highlighted in this quote through its association with the Secularist movement. But the separation, in general, affected the whole of England. Science was no longer viewed by academia as compatible with Christianity, and society struggled to find a way to incorporate new scientific truths with biblical absolutes. The upper classes, who struggled most with the lofty ideas of the changing theology and philosophy, portrayed an attitude of confusion that the working classes noticed and imitated. The British people began to question the reason for their existence and, as mentioned before, the necessity for their God.

The method of answering these questions differed from church to church, from person to person, so much so that Knight and Mason write, “The diversity of perspectives among nineteenth-century writers who engaged with Christianity offers considerable challenges for those interested in the relation between religion and literature in the period” (9). The Anglican Church’s overwhelming negative attitude toward the Catholic Church continued well into the late 1800s, as seen throughout *Vendetta!* But the rising divisions within the Church of England caused their own problems. The Church, while remaining one unified entity, split into two major theological directions: the High Church (Tractarianism), which moved toward a “purer” Catholic liturgy, and the Low Church (Puritanism), which “reformed” the Anglican Church by accepting the premises of the Protestant revival that was then sweeping through England.³ Both of the Church’s positions attacked each other, causing rifts within the Christian community of the

Established Church. Some individuals took these rifts as a sign of the Church's inability to adapt to cultural change and began to create their own Christian religions, as seen in the lives of Marie Corelli and Oscar Wilde.

Many people sought advice from the spirit world, causing a stark rise in occult practices such as séances and the consulting of mediums. Ouija boards and automatic writing were used to speak to the dead, and a general attitude of curiosity about the afterlife seemed to fascinate most Britons. But controversy raged as to whether such practices were evil and should be condemned by the Church or were supernatural gifts given by the Creator to be used by Christians. As Richard Noakes claimed in his article "Spiritualism, Science, and the Supernatural in Mid-Victorian Britain," "While many used Spiritualism to support Christianity, and to combat atheism, agnosticism, materialism, and rationalism, others believed Spiritualist activities threatened cherished Protestant beliefs [by] aboli[shing] the boundary between this world and the next [and] reject[ing] eternal damnation" (27). During these séances and automated writing sessions, the ghosts of the dead were presumed to speak from beyond the grave, raising questions about the afterlife and the reality of Hell. Corelli and many other Britons sought to incorporate such things into their view of the Christian faith. Stoker, on the other hand, attacked such things as the very same superstitions held by commoners, pointing out the hypocrisy of the upper classes for accepting "sophisticated" superstitions.

Each novel analyzed within this thesis addresses society's concern with the rise of counterfeit religion, a concern directly connected to the eroding foundations of the Anglican community. The arguments erupting between High Church and Low Church,

Protestant and Catholic, science and religion, only served to fuel the ever-growing British concerns about the nature of God and the position of religion within daily life. The foundations of Christian Britain were crumbling, and the Gothic novel, ever the genre for controversy and cultural upheavals, became the chosen form for those writers who chose to analyze and criticize the religious problems they saw within society. It was the Gothic's grotesque and mysterious nature that could tackle questions about the supernatural, query the afterlife, and raise people from the dead. The Catholic Church, reemerging in Irish England and in the form of the High Anglican Church, was reborn in Gothic literature as the heartless and adulterous woman. The superstitions of the occult that were creeping into mainstream Christianity became the lurking vampire invading London. The worship of beauty and of art was shown to lack the redemptive powers necessary to save the human soul from damnation. Each novel does not praise the current religious establishments, but points out their flaws and defects. The authors critique quasi-Christianity, or society's attempts to be Christian while also changing the very essence of what had, up to that time, been Christian. While all three novels offer different views as to the nature of British Christianity's saving grace, they all give direct criticisms of the problem and propose at least a make-shift solution.

This thesis is just one of several studies necessary to fill research gaps found in the field of Christianity and religious counterfeits in the Gothic novels of the *fin de siècle*. Chapter three analyzes only one religious aspect of Corelli's *Vendetta!*, and any number of topics or themes within that and others of Corelli's novels still needs to be researched. Even with the extensive research that has been done on both *Dracula* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, these novels too have gaps in critical research. As noted in Chapter Four,

the religious aspects of *Dracula* have long been ignored by academic critics; while *Dorian Gray* is often read in light of its aesthetic nature, very rarely is consideration given to the Christian elements that exist within the novel. This thesis focuses on one narrow theme as found within three of the most popular novels of the *fin de siècle*; countless other Gothic novels existed within the period, and each novel offers a host of themes and plot devices to be analyzed.

Although the increased occultism of the period cannot be ignored, and the intrinsic spirituality of the Gothic novel is undeniable, far too often the Christianity of both the Victorian period and its Gothic literature is trivialized or left unanalyzed. As the Gothic novel continues to gain popularity within the academic and non-academic community alike, more critical studies of the religious movements behind these novels should be completed by scholars. Christianity and its conflict with the changing cultural movements during the *fin de siècle* have long been considered one of the most influential crises of the Victorian period. It is time that this same conflict also be recognized and analyzed as a key element in the Gothic literature of the *fin de siècle*.

NOTES

Chapter One

¹ This list was compiled after a brief glance at the chapter headings and opening sentences of Punter and Byron's *The Gothic*.

² Montague Summers' *The Gothic Quest* contains a most excellent chronology of the early Gothic, including some description of the historical influences on the first Gothic novels.

³ Dates for literary periods are flexible, usually marked by important cultural events or literary deaths. The dates listed in this thesis are taken from *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Major Authors* (2001).

Chapter Two

¹ Most scholars associate the beginning of the Victorian period with the death of noted Romantic author Sir Walter Scott and the passing of the Reform Act of 1832, even though Princess Victoria would not take the throne for another five years. *Norton*, however, dates the beginning of the Victorian period at 1830. The discrepancies in the period's dating come from the overlapping concerns and emotions that ran through the century. The Victorian period falls into "the long Nineteenth Century," a term for the years stretching from the early-1790s until the start of World War I, so named because, in the minds of many critics, the Industrial Revolution caused the decades to meld together, and each literary period persisted well into the next.

² The Victorian sentiment that "actions speak louder than words" should be taken into account here.

³ For more information about Anglican High Church reform and the British attack on

Popery, see Knight and Mason's chapter on the Oxford Movement in *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature*. Also of some interest is the British "Public Worship Regulation Act of 1874," which essentially condemned certain rituals used in the Anglican Church as Popery.

⁴ The notable exception would be, of course, Northern Ireland. Although Ireland was still a united country at this point in history, the citizens of the northern counties in Ireland were essentially Anglican, being physically closer to London than the rest of the island.

⁵ See note 3.

⁶ A good, although brief, article on the development of evolutionary theories prior to Charles Darwin is Paul Elliott's "Erasmus Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and the Origins of the Evolutionary Worldview in British Provincial Scientific Culture, 1770-1850," printed in *Isis* 94.1 (2003).

⁷ The Victorians were very concerned with the issue of humanity versus bestiality. Much of Victorian life revolved around repressing the inner animal, a topic which is addressed in numerous books and articles on the Victorian era.

Chapter Three

¹ In "Marie Corelli: 'The Story of One Forgotten,'" Brenda Ayres also identifies the Gothic in Corelli's 1886 novel *A Romance of Two Worlds* (207), 1887 novel *Thelma* (207-8), and 1889 novel *Ardath* (209-12).

² Robyn Hallim claims several times throughout her article on the Electric Creed that "Marie Corelli was vehemently opposed to spiritualism and seances" (27). In her biography on Corelli, Teresa Ransom also mentions that "Marie wrote this book [*The Romance of Two Worlds* (1886)] at a time when spiritualism and hypnotism were both

popular and fashionable. She did not entirely approve of either” (31). However, Corelli’s own creed seems to be more “spiritualistic” than Christian, and she was known to participate in séances, facts that both Hallim and Ransom do not dispute. The reality lies in the fact that Corelli’s words contradict her very own actions. While Corelli saw her religion as “scientific” and rationalized, the reality is that she managed to combine the primary aspects of Victorian occultism with the convenient aspects of Christianity, creating an alternative to “scientific religion” (i.e. Darwinism) which relied more on spiritualism than Corelli wished to admit.

³ These religious connections are not so apparent within *Vendetta!* as they are within other of Corelli’s novels, such as *Ziska: The Problem of a Wicked Soul*, “God’s Good Man,” and *A Romance of Two Worlds*. However, the novel does end in divine retribution through a natural event, an earthquake followed by howling winds, which could be tied back to similar Old Testament appearance of a vengeful God in the same manner.

⁴ Robyn Hallim goes into extensive detail about Corelli’s Electric Creed, the type of detail that is not possible in a thesis of this length.

⁵ Although Corelli ends her epidemic within months, the actual cholera epidemic in Naples lasted from 1884 to 1911, with more than 5,000 known deaths within the first year. At the time of *Vendetta!*’s publication, this epidemic would have still been newsworthy within England. For more information, see Frank Snowden’s *Naples in the Time of Cholera, 1884-1911*.

⁶ Even the extremely religious *Dracula*, discussed in the next chapter, uses scientific discovery and detective work to move the plot along, not a gradual revelation of partial truths and supernatural coincident, used primarily by Radcliffe as a means of furthering

the motion of her plot.

⁷ The idea of the Catholic Church as “Mother of all Christians” predates even this declaration by Pope Gregory I. Around 250 A.D., Bishop Cyprian of Carthage wrote in his work “On the Unity of the Church” (*De Unitate Ecclesiae*) that “[h]e can no longer have God for his Father who has not the Church for his mother” (VI).

⁸ His daughter Stella and the innkeeper’s daughter Lilla are not among these exemplary women because, as Romani notes several times, they are not yet women.

⁹ After the second Vatican council, the architecture of most Catholic Churches moved from the Gothic and Romanesque styles toward the more modern settings typically seen in Protestant churches of the same era. The result was a loss of the traditional layout in the Catholic Church (Lynchburg’s Saint Thomas More Catholic Church is an excellent example of this issue). However, numerous examples of the traditional style, complete with rear choir lofts, still exist: Cathedral of the Sacred Heart (1906) in Richmond, Saint Joseph’s Cathedral (1866) in Columbus, and even Notre-Dame de Reims (1211) in Paris.

¹⁰ In *The Romance of Two Worlds*, Corelli does show Catholicism in a positive light, as she creates two Catholics to fill the role of hero within the novel. In a note found in her article “Marie Corelli: ‘The Story of One Forgotten,’” Ayres writes that Corelli’s novels usually attack Catholicism, “[e]xcept curiously in *Romance*, in which Zara and her brother are Catholic as well as spiritually advanced in the use of personal electricity, potions, baths, and soul travel” (222). However, two possible explanations exist for this abnormality. First, Corelli could be using these two characters to portray the potential result of belief in her own “Electric Creed,” as the characters combine elements of Christianity with elements of spirituality. But more apparent, and a more feasible

explanation, is that *Romance* lies in a completely different realm of the novel than does *Vendetta!*. The former relies almost exclusively on “willful suspension of disbelief,” as characters are transported between spiritual worlds and smite each other with spiritual electricity. The latter, on the other hand, requires very little in the way of suspension of disbelief, as the settings, characters, and events are well within the realm of normal human occurrences (the only possible exception being God’s vengeance in the closing scenes).

Chapter Four

¹ In his introduction to *The Essential Dracula*, Leonard Wolfe gives a chronology of the early film versions of *Dracula*:

Though Stoker, in the year *Dracula* was published, mounted a staged reading of the novel to protect its theatrical copyright, the King Vampire did not actually reach the commercial stage until Hamilton Deane put it on in 1925. A revised version by Deane and John Balderston appeared in 1927 (in London in September; in New York in October). The title role in New York was played by a Hungarian-born Shakespearean actor named Bela Lugosi Blasko. It is to that theatrical version and to that actor that we owe the 1931 film *Dracula* which recreated Bram Stoker’s monster and made his name a household word.

But before that happened, F. W. Murnau, in Germany in 1922 produced a silent film that he called *Nosferatu: Eine Symphonie des Grauens* (*Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror*) which was a crude rip-off of Stoker’s novel. (xix)

² Within the seven years of publication, *Journal of Dracula Studies* has only published one religiously-focused article, “Keeping the Faith: Catholicism in *Dracula* and Its Adaptations,” which focused on the presentation of Catholicism in the cinematic adaptations of *Dracula*.

³ Known then as the Anglican Church of Ireland.

⁴ Stoker’s first novel, *The Snake’s Pass* (1890), is a direct criticism of Catholic / Protestant relations in Ireland at the time. He expounds upon his position through the characters and plot structure of the novel, his only novel to be set in Ireland.

⁵ How Van Helsing, a supposed native of Amsterdam, came to be Roman Catholic is never explained or rationalized. Beginning at the time of the Reformation and ending in the early 1800s, the officials of Amsterdam were extremely hostile toward Popery and the Catholic Church, banning all Catholic priests and parishes from the city. Although the number of Catholic citizens would have been on the rise in the late 1800s (the explosion began in the 1860s), *The Catholic Encyclopedia* acknowledges that in 1899, 23% of the population was Catholic and another 12% Jewish, while the remaining 65% were split between Calvinism and the Anabaptist movement (Weber). Outside the city, the ratio of Catholics to Protestants was even lower. This fact, along with Van Helsing’s constant use of the German language instead of Dutch, paints a shadowy picture of the man’s history and background. Perhaps these minor details are simply to be included to Stoker’s growing list of oversights within the novel.

⁶ It must be noted here that the lady would not be Roman Catholic, but Eastern Orthodox, a “Catholic” division of the Church that places the seat of the Church in Constantinople and not in Rome. Both sects wear the crucifix (rosary) and cross themselves in a similar

manner, so Harker might simply have confused the woman for a Roman Catholic.

Another possibility is that Stoker overlooked this small detail.

⁷ In Marie Corelli's *Vendetta!*, as shown before, this British attitude of hatred toward Catholicism and Popery is emphasized to an extreme, painting a picture of religion that is the exact opposite of Stoker's Catholic Christianity.

⁸ According to the CIA's *World Factbook*, the country previously known as Transylvania was separated from Romania proper by the Carpathian Mountains to the east and the Transylvanian Alps to the south, with the primary portion of the country existing in the crevasses and plains between the peaks (online).

⁹ While Slavic and Serbian are members of the Indo-European language group, Turkish exists within its own language group. However, incorporating Turkish words into the Slavic language is not outlandish – Turkish is spoken extensively in Bulgaria, the country directly south of Romania.

¹⁰ As stated in the Catholic Catechism, the Roman Catholic Church holds the position that only the sin of blasphemy against or rejection of the Holy Spirit is unpardonable. Suicide becomes an unpardonable sin because it is an act resulting from the belief that the Holy Spirit is unable to relieve mortal sufferings (rejection of eternal hope), thus becoming a rejection of the Holy Spirit himself.

¹¹ See *Dracula* pages 356-357, which details the living conditions of the Count's house in Piccadilly. Even Wolf admits that the passage invokes some human sympathy for the Vampire.

¹² On the apparent contradictions within this statement, Herbert notes, "In *Dracula* . . . for all its putative devotion to the cause of true religion, the two supposedly antithetical

categories of religion and superstition reveal an uncontrollable tendency to collapse into one another” (104). What Herbert writes is intrinsically true of many cultures and authors. Despite Stoker’s fervent attempts to separate superstition and Christianity, he unconsciously reverts to the Victorian mindset of superstition and science, causing a Gothic doubling of Van Helsing and Dracula (Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde).

¹³The specific problems with this novel’s Catholic dogma are far too complex to include in this thesis, beyond saying that there are discrepancies between Stoker’s Catholic and Rome’s Catholic that are well noted and documented by scholars and clergy alike. D. Bruno Starrs mentions such facts, as well as provides a short analysis of the pro-Catholic allegories within the text, in his article “Keeping the Faith: Catholicism in Dracula and its Adaptations” (*Journal of Dracula Studies* 6 [2004]: 13-18). Also, as mentioned in the text, Wolf’s annotations provide excellent outside sources for anyone who wishes to consider such religious discrepancies at length.

Chapter Five

¹ While the Catholic Church still maintains the immorality of homosexuality, the Church of England has recently allowed for a more accepting attitude. For many years, the stance of the international Anglican Communion (not exclusively the Church of England) was that gay parishioners could still receive communion as long as they remained celibate, a condition also applying to heterosexual parishioners not bound in marriage. In 1998 at the Lambeth Conference, the Church of England upheld a statute declaring that marriage was only to be between a man and a woman, but the Archbishop of Canterbury also decried other Anglican churches that supported violence against homosexuals, such as the Anglican Church of Nigeria. In 2003, the Archbishop of Canterbury appointed the

openly gay Jeffery John to the post of Bishop of Reading, although John would step down before his appointment was finalized. In 2005, the Church of England affirmed that open, non-celibate homosexuals were eligible for communion and confirmation, but this topic continues to be debated throughout the wider Anglican Church.

² The company still exists in London as an imprint of Penguin Books.

³ With the recent rise of Gender Criticism, the “original” 1890 text of *Dorian Gray* has again become popular in graduate programs and more liberal English departments, although the revised 1891 edition is still considered the academic authority.

⁴ While many herald this work as the epitome of aesthetic literature, Wilde himself believed that aesthetics could be taken too far. For Wilde, there was still to be natural consequences for unreconciled sin. This final point will be expounded upon later in the chapter.

⁵ Over the years, several different versions of the Faust legends have been published, each with its own history and unique literary purpose. For this thesis, the version referenced will be Goethe’s *Faust*, which would have been popular at the time and whose plot is more in line with the literary movements of the *fin de siècle*.

⁶ Dorian’s cry of “It would be murder!” when Basil threatens to destroy the painting on page 67 only makes sense if one accepts the fact that Dorian, at that moment, realizes that the painting (art) contains his soul.

⁷ The “rise of Puritanism” in Victorian England was directly connected to the Christian morality of the age and is referencing the Puritanism that existed during the rule of Oliver Cromwell. While Queen Victoria many not have gone so far as to close all the theatres and ban Christmas as being too sensually pleasing, the Victorian Age did experience an

ever-increasing concern about the morality of actions and words, thus leading to a more “Puritan” society.

⁸ The stone described is an Alexandrite. According to the International Gem Society, a true Alexandrite as described would retail today for around \$10,000 - \$15,000 per carat.

⁹ Confusion for modern readers might occur because these stones are easily purchased at the local Wal-Mart for \$25 a carat. Perhaps these colors were quite rare during Wilde’s day, or perhaps Wilde simply liked the brilliance of the topaz.

¹⁰ These gems, while quite commonplace today, were only just coming into fashion again in the mid-1700s due to the accidental creation of synthetic Spinel. The red variety was initially confused for a ruby and could be equally costly.

¹¹ Since amethysts are created from quartz and both sapphires and rubies come from corundum, what Wilde is implying with this passage is questionable, beyond saying that the stones were very rare.

¹² An uncut emerald (one carat) can run as high as \$800. Because large emeralds are difficult to mine, a two carat emerald is over \$1000 more than two one-carat emeralds. Some three carat emeralds of unimpressive color have sold for over \$5000, while a perfect, uncut three carat gem can cost almost \$2000 more than its duller counterpart.

¹³ French translation literally means “of the old rock,” as opposed to the lesser brilliant *de la nouvelle roche*.

¹⁴ In the final chapters of the novel, Wilde makes some critical mistakes in respect to the aspects of Catholic confession. At times, the repentance that Wilde describes is most certainly Catholic, as it requires repentance and penance (the sacrament of reconciliation). However, at other times in the work, Wilde implies a Protestant form of

grace through faith, either faith in forgiveness or faith in God's power. These inconsistencies are often attributed to the haste in which Wilde wrote the novel.

Chapter Six

¹ In brief, natural theology holds that the attributes of God can be found through reason alone (whether by *a priori* or *a posteriori* arguments), as opposed to revealed theology, which claims that the attributes of God are found through scripture and the leadings of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of natural theology is to avoid any appeals to divine revelation, relying instead on philosophical and scientific means to justify all beliefs in God. Kant listed several problems he saw within both revealed and natural theology, claiming instead that theology deals with matters that lie beyond reason's ken. After Kant, theologians had to deal with the Kantian theory that knowledge about noumenal reality transcends human cognitive ability. This summary does not adequately cover the subject, which is discussed more thoroughly in any number of books on philosophy and metaphysics.

² I say theoretical separation because the Anglican Church today still falls under the authority of Parliament and the ruling monarch. However, non-Anglicans gained the rights to vote (c. 1829) and to attend Oxford (c. 1871) in the same period as the rise of Secularism in England, two events which show a separation from the previously upheld state-established religion (also believed to be within the realm of secularization).

³ A third faction within the Church eventually developed between the two extremes, known as the Broad Church. This division of the Anglican Church accepted both High Church and Low Church liturgy and theology, based primarily on the desires of the individual parishes. Because the aim of the Broad Church was to avoid the schisms that

the High and Low Churches had created, I do not bring them up again in this conclusion.

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