

Maria Purves. *The Gothic and Catholicism: Religion, Cultural Exchange and the Popular Novel, 1785–1829*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009. viii+228pp. £75;US\$85. ISBN 978-0-7083-2091-4.

This study begins with a bold assertion that the prejudice against Roman Catholicism in the literary Gothic of the long eighteenth century remains “virtually uncontested” (1). Maria Purves claims that the scholarly agreement on the conventions of anti-Catholicism in the early English Gothic is a misprision arising from an unrepresentative focus on a handful of works, and she sets out to challenge the commonplaces of anti-Catholic orthodoxy. Her study offers a review of the sentimental appropriation of Catholicism in the latter part of the eighteenth century, followed by readings of a number of Gothic novels that present sympathetic portrayals of Catholicism.

Purves aligns this textual tolerance with evidence of a growing sympathy in 1790s England for the persecuted clergy and women religious of revolutionary France, thousands of whom fled for refuge to England where they were permitted to re-establish their communities and practise their religion. Linda Colley, in her influential *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), argued that intolerant Protestantism served as a solder to weld a Britishness of English, Welsh, and Scots. Purves suggests that, beginning with the first Catholic Relief Bill in 1778, a growing climate of tolerance followed in the wake of the fury of the Gordon Riots. By 1791, the second Relief Act reflected an increasingly sympathetic view of Catholicism. The persecution of the church had allowed a certain blurring of Catholicism and Christianity as targets of the French Revolution, and Edmund Burke’s defence of Britain’s evolutionary progress held reminders of the Catholic roots of its own institutions.

The British could hardly condemn men who remained faithful to their god and their king, and the British Parliament agreed to support the émigré French clergy. (Burke himself worked tirelessly on their behalf, pleading for “two shirts” to replace the rags in which many had arrived, and haircuts so that they would be recognized as priests.) Purves reminds readers that remnants of Catholicism had survived the Dissolution of the 1530s, with convents in Hammersmith and York, for example, and known Jesuit activity in London and Oxford. The resettling of twenty-one English convents from France, the relocation of the Jesuit College at St Omer to Stonyhurst, and the establishing of Ampleforth and Downside Abbeys by the early nineteenth century all suggest that for many English readers, monks and nuns were not exclusively the preserve of the exotic and foreign.

This growing tolerance, at least in more conservative quarters, was

reflected, Purves claims, in the numerous Gothic novels of the period offering positive portraits of Catholic figures. The examination begins with an exploration of the aestheticizing in the eighteenth century of tropes of Roman Catholicism, the cloister in particular. The influence of the letters of Abélard and Héloïse, particularly through Alexander Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard* (1717) and its numerous French translations throughout the century, is traced into the nineteenth century. Likewise, the graveyard settings of de Tencin's novel *Mémoires du comte de Comminge* (1735), set in the monastery of La Trappe, become an influential "locus classicus of the Gothic" (67) linking the cloister to romance and pathos. These representations of the cloister and monastic life offer more thoughtful treatments than the sensational accounts of horror, depravity, and young women immured and left to die.

The third chapter takes on the most representative figures of anti-Catholic orthodoxy and the Gothic to mine ambiguities in the work of Matthew Lewis and Ann Radcliffe and claim a genuine interest in Catholicism on the part of both writers. Purves suggests, for example, that representations of despair and damnation in *The Monk* would have been read by Lewis's readers as a conventional interpretation of a standard Christian theme, and that the priest Schedoni's penitence in Radcliffe's *The Italian* is indicative of her increasing interest in Catholic doctrines and practices. It is here that the weakness of some of the argument becomes most visible. The discussion requires a more extended engagement with recent scholarly work on the complexities of religion and the Gothic; books such as Mark Canuel, *Religion, Toleration, and British Writing, 1790–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), and Susan Griffin, *Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), are not cited, for example.

The strength of this book lies in the discussion in the final two chapters of little-known works that broaden the field under consideration. The first of these offers close readings of novels by Catharine Selden, Eleanor Sleath, and Agnes Lancaster that present an alternate view of the Catholic female, with portrayals of nuns as strong, positive figures who appeal because of, not in spite of, their Roman Catholic devotion. Rather than highlighting features more palatable to the Protestant reader (Radcliffe's convent as comfortable hotel), these novels present portraits of nuns who are intelligent, congenial, charitable, deeply—occasionally sublimely—devout, and above all content women for whom Christian piety trumps sensibility.

The book concludes with a countering consideration of the figure of the monk. Readings of less familiar works such as "The Friar's Tale" (subsequently discussed in a group of novels as *The Friar's Tale*), *The Monk of the Grotto*, *The Convent of St. Michael*, and *The Confessional of Valombre* offer an analysis of a cloistered masculinity more reflective of the values of chivalry than those of the Inquisition. Indeed, the author

asserts that these novelists were intent upon promoting “orthodox Christian [*sic*] beliefs” and that contrary to the scholarly view that denies any religious dimension to the Gothic form, these novels served as vehicles of “counter-revolutionary religious sentiment” (170).

Absent significant evidence for contemporary readership and reception, the tantalizing claims here for hitherto neglected explorations of soul, self, and Roman Catholicism in the Gothic are blunted by the obscurity of some of the texts and their authors. And it is unlikely that many readers will need reminding that “Christianity was still a way of life and thought” in the period (208). At the same time, the study usefully reminds us of the elusive cross-Channel entangling of doctrine, faith, and belief in its politics and fiction.

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Louisa Shea. *The Cynic Enlightenment: Diogenes in the Salon*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. xx+262pp. ISBN 978-0-8018-9385-8.

In her appealingly ambitious study of Cynicism in the eighteenth century (and beyond), Louisa Shea perceptively articulates the tensions that have long structured debates around the social effects of philosophical critique. Shea is interested in the “Cynic legacy,” as she calls it, for the role that this inheritance plays in enabling eighteenth-century writers in France and Germany to test the limits of their own intellectual commitments. The figure of Diogenes—defacer of norms and, as Shea helpfully reminds us, of currencies—serves as a crucial point of reference for a wide range of writers seeking, during the Enlightenment and well into the twentieth century, to imagine (and later, to rethink) the position of the public intellectual. But Diogenes, as a critic and a rascal, is not just dogged in his attacks on social conventions but actively doglike: his reported bouts of public urination and masturbation, his shamelessness and poverty, his disrespect for authorities of all kinds (religious, political, and philosophical), make Cynicism particularly resistant to co-optation, even (or perhaps especially) by its “heirs.” In this sense, the Cynic legacy remains defined by ambivalence, and necessarily so.

As Shea argues, the Enlightenment period bears witness to the return to circulation of the coin of Cynicism, in the salons and among the philosophes, in France as well as in Germany. But the attempt to make of Diogenes the representative of an engaged and enlightened philosophy quickly becomes, as Shea portrays it, an effort to domesticate the Dog. Shea shows how the eighteenth-century reception of Cynicism