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### **'Really, though secretly, a papist': G.K. Chesterton's and J. Meade Falkner's rewritings of the gothic.**

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This is a pre-copy-editing, author-produced PDF of an article accepted for publication in *Literature and Theology* following peer review. The definitive publisher-authenticated version of McEvoy, Emma (2004) *'Really, though secretly, a papist': G.K. Chesterton's and J. Meade Falkner's rewritings of the gothic*. *Literature and Theology*, 18 (1). pp. 49-61 is available online at:

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Word Count (excluding end notes): 6, 156

### Abstract

This article considers the rewriting of those Gothic conventions which are most symptomatic of Gothic anti-Catholicism in the works of Catholic-sympathizing authors, J. Meade Falkner, G. K. Chesterton. Chesterton, converted to Roman Catholicism in 1922, creates a priest committed to divine rationality and exposes contemporary Protestant “superstition”. J. Meade Falkner’s *Moonfleet*, inspired by Gothic revivalism - a movement in many respects antithetical to the sentiments of the Gothic novel - rewrites the relations between father and son, past and present, individual and community.

### **“Really, though secretly, a Papist”: G. K. Chesterton’s and J. Meade Falkner’s rewritings of the Gothic**

The Gothic novel is a fundamentally Protestant genre, as critics from Sr. Mary Muriel Tarr<sup>i</sup> to Robert Mighall<sup>ii</sup> have pointed out. The early writers of Gothic (with the interesting possible exceptions of Charlotte Dacre and Elinor Sleath<sup>iii</sup>) were Protestant in varying shades from high Anglican to the mild Lutheranism of Ann Radcliffe or the stern Calvinism of James Hogg and Charles Maturin. Anti-Catholicism, both explicit and implicit, has characterized the genre from the first. Not only do such works as Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* and Matthew Lewis’ *The Monk* fulminate against the corruption of Roman Catholic institutions and the deleterious effects of superstition, but, it has been argued, the theological biases of the

Gothic manifest themselves at other levels of narrative - in terms, for example, of location, period and such themes as the relations between parents and children.

Gothic texts tend to revisit a seminal period of history and to feature a curse and imprisonment, combining what Chris Baldick calls “a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space”<sup>iv</sup> For Baldick, the Gothic operates by a kind of “homeopathic principle”<sup>v</sup>. A little ingestion of the past (understood for the writers of earlier Gothic novels as foreign, feudal and Catholic) keeps it at bay; a little knowledge of tyranny strengthens the resolve of the present. Mighall, continuing this mode of analysis, declares that Gothic narratives operate within the parameters of a Whig Protestant version of history where the subject is anachronism and the necessary onward thrust of modernity. The Past is portrayed as both petrified and threatening while the present is progressive. Gothic looks back - to the bad old days of feudalism, Catholicism, superstition and tyranny - but its momentum is that of the present, escaping, self-defining.

Victor Sage’s *Horror Fiction and the Protestant Tradition* shows how Catholicism in Gothic texts is almost synonymous with superstition and corruption and irrevocably linked to feudalism. The feudal relation is played out in terms of generations as the young protagonist confronts the corrupt powers of the Old World embodied in a father figure. The parent-child relationship, as Sage notes, is also theologically inflected. In text after text we find enlightened quasi-Protestant young protagonists (Moncada in Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer*, Elena in Radcliffe’s *The Italian*) trying to escape the clutches of repressive parent figures (Moncada’s mother who has become a victim of ecclesiastical blackmail, Elena’s pseudo-father, the monk Schedoni).

As Sage has shown, it is not just the Gothic’s subject matter that may or may not be consciously Protestant; its psychology is Protestant. The range of imagery, the nature of the protagonists, the visual focus all derive from a Protestant aesthetic. The individual

hero/heroine is an individual, faithfully totting up the account book of the conscience, in flight from suspect communality, which tends to be associated with Catholicism. Gothic is pervaded by a general distrust, even a demonization of the showy, the theatrical. Art is equated with artifice, ritual with insincerity. Victor Sage quoting late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Protestant travellers experiencing the religious art of Italy shows how they associate Catholicism with theatricality and seduction. They look with horror and fascination and a self-chastising longing. Their enjoyment is bedded on horror and the superb visions must be condemned. Moncada's mother in *Melmoth the Wanderer*, as Baldick has pointed out<sup>vi</sup>, is a prime example of such a figuring of Catholicism: she is linked to sexual misdemeanour and repression, lavishly dressed, beautiful, theatrical, puppet-like, despairing.

Sage's work is invaluable for the contemporary scholar of the Gothic. He points out not only that the "rhetoric of the horror novel is demonstrably theological in character"<sup>vii</sup> but also that its theological associations would have been decoded by contemporary readers.

However, not only would anti-Catholic Protestant readers pick up on the theological ramifications of Gothic texts but so also would Catholic readers, and readers who were High-Church Anglicans with Catholic sympathies. That is why, I argue, it is possible also to find examples of pro-Catholic Gothic re-writing. It is possible for Catholic-sympathizing writers consciously to rewrite or renegotiate the Gothic. Their work, though containing typical Gothic tropes (crumbling ancestral halls, curses from the past, generational conflict, doubling, imprisonment) will inflect them differently, present them as part of a different schema.

In this article I am going to consider Gothic re-writing in the work of G. K. Chesterton and J. Meade Falkner. My treatment is not chronological; I start with Chesterton whose readings are exemplary and enable me to establish a foundation for the rest of the article. Both writers worked in popular genres: the works of Chesterton that I will be considering are pieces of detective fiction from *The Club of Queer Trades* and the *Father Brown* stories, (1911-35). Falkner's *Moonfleet* (1898) is a children's adventure story in the manner of Robert Louis

Stevenson's *Treasure Island* or *Kidnapped*. None of these works is wholly Gothic but each contains Gothic material - and the Gothic material in each of these works is inflected in a challenging manner.

Chesterton

Chesterton is a percipient reader of the ideological and theological connotations of Gothic material, and he aggressively re-contextualizes much Gothic material, in order to provide a critique not only of its Protestantism but also of the assumptions of a scientific materialism. The term "secretly" in "Really, though secretly, a Papist" does not, of course, apply to Chesterton's stories from *The Secret of Father Brown* and *The Incredulity of Father Brown* for in 1922 Chesterton had been received into the Roman Catholic Church. His writing is very much un-Gothic in spirit, provocatively reworking plot and character.

G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown stories feature many cunning rewritings of Gothic scenarios. The stories that I'll be considering are in that hybrid vein, the Gothic detective story, previous examples of which include Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* and Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Unlike Collins and Doyle, however, Chesterton is not interested in working in the Gothic tradition. Instead he works against it, calling upon its conventions in order to deconstruct them. He does not set his tales in the past or indulge the Gothic love of ambiance; in fact, in many of the stories, the imposition of the Gothic atmosphere onto the "Gothic" plot proves to be mistaken - a matter of bluff Protestant perception and bigotry. In the stories considered below Chesterton takes up several Gothic tropes, rewriting the relations between father and son, and the themes of the Double, imprisonment and superstition.

"The Worst Crime in the World" takes the reader to an old Scottish Castle which is directly compared to Radcliffe's *Udolpho*. Father Brown and the lawyer Granby are there to question

the old Baronet as to whether he will let his son inherit the estate. The son, first encountered in a gallery, looking over Cubist painting is very definitely of the new world, his father of the old. However, the “worst crime in the world” is not that of filicide; Chesterton gives us a very different narrative of Gothic familial relations. Father Brown’s deductions lead to the revelation that the old man is really the son in disguise. The “old man’s” injunction that the two should never meet is thus the son’s “insane intellectual pleasure..... the joke shared with the devil”<sup>viii</sup>. The Son, through the crime of patricide has become his own benefactor and his own Double. In the guise of his father he becomes his own externalized and murdered conscience (being able to “tell you in one character that he had committed a crime in another character”<sup>ix</sup>).

In Chapter Six of *The Club of Queer Trades*, “The Eccentric Seclusion of the Old Lady”, Chesterton teasingly addresses the convention of unjust imprisonment. Rupert Grant rushes into a darkened cellar in which a woman is locked (intriguingly, given Charlotte Perkins Stetson’s story, the room is covered in yellow wallpaper<sup>x</sup>). According to the dictates of Protestant Gothic, she should be the persecuted maiden, young, fair, at the mercy of an older tyrant. Chesterton’s is a different type of imprisoned maiden: she is an old maid, whose backbiting gossip ruined a love-match; her imprisonment is voluntarily undergone as a penance. Chesterton deliberately, and somewhat perversely, features the Catholic institution of penance as something not merely punitive, but spiritually helpful.

“The Chief Mourner of Marne” deals with the anti-Catholicism of the Gothic head on. It is a story of doubles, fratricide, supposed monastic imprisonment and blackmail; a story in which Chesterton turns the notion of superstition and prejudice on its head. The story announced at the beginning is that of James Mair, who, devoted to his cousin Maurice Mair, goes into excessive mourning when he dies, and becomes a dupe of priests, (referred to by the newspaper proprietor, John Cockspur, a “Toronto Orangeman”, as “vampires”<sup>xi</sup>). According to the Protestant tellers of his tale, Mair shuts himself in his gloomy mansion, when he “might

have been useful to the Empire”<sup>xii</sup> and remains celibate when he might have married Viola Grayson. His faults are supposed to spring from misguided Catholic sensibilities, unnatural and anti-social. Father Brown’s involvement in the story is to find out the reality behind the myth-making for the sake of his Church. As the plot thickens, it is revealed that James Mair is supposed to have killed his cousin in a duel - a crime that the Protestant cast of the story believe ought not “cut off a man for ever”<sup>xiii</sup> - and the small party of the Anglo-Indian general, the newspaper man, and aristocratic ladies, go to free James Mair from monkish influence, and lead him back into society.

In this story, the crime of the past is not as has been believed. James Mair was killed by his cousin; shot through the heart by one who had merely feigned death. The survivor is not James but Maurice. They are, to an extent, Doubles, but moral Doubles. At the disclosure of identity, the sympathy of the little group vanishes. Manly murder - the duel - can be forgiven, but, as the general puts it “if you think I’m going to be reconciled to a filthy viper like that, I tell you I wouldn’t say a word to save him from hell.”<sup>xiv</sup> Father Brown at this point exposes their prejudice “you only pardon the sins that you don’t really think sinful. You only forgive criminals when they commit what you don’t regard as crimes but rather as conventions.”<sup>xv</sup> The concept of superstition has been turned on its head, and relates to social mores, rather than the Catholic belief. In this story, again, the sinner (who in being adopted as sinner is saved from being a criminal) has chosen imprisonment - and it is only the Roman Catholic Church which transcends prejudice and extends sympathy and forgiveness. In the Catholic rewrite of the Gothic plot, the Gothic villain is recuperated, and given a chance of redemption.

Throughout his oeuvre, Chesterton delighted in setting up straw men - the bogies of a lingering Victorian imperialism - as potential villains. Thus, in “The Sign of the Broken Sword”<sup>xvi</sup> it is not the Brazilian freedom-fighter, but the British General Arthur St. Clare who is the villain. Likewise, in “The Mirror of the Magistrate”<sup>xvii</sup>, the villain is not to be found, in the roll-call of the un-English, all with incriminating circumstantial evidence against

them - the ginger-haired, hooked nosed Michael Flood, the servant with the “heavy , yellow face, with a touch of something Asiatic”<sup>xviii</sup>, or the Anglo-Roumanian poet, Osrice Orm, who lives in Paris. The story’s villain is the very English prosecuting barrister, who plays upon fears of Bolshevist conspiracies and evil foreigners in order to incriminate Osrice Orm and mask his own crime. Chesterton’s story “The Red Moon of Meru”<sup>xix</sup> looks back to Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone* and Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Sign of Four*, in that it tells of the theft from its English keeper of a jewel of the East. The theft of the ruby is of course not committed by the Master of the Mountain, the Indian mystic, but by the materialistic young mystic-disprover, Hunter.

Gothic distrust of the priestly figure and the rationalization of the supernatural, is, for Chesterton, directly linked with the spirit of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century scientific materialism. It is a connection Robert Mighall also makes when he writes of Protestantism and Whig teleology in the Gothic. For Chesterton, late Victorian materialism and the sciences of eugenics and criminology are offshoots of a supposedly sceptical Protestant mind-set, but are themselves profoundly marked by superstition.

The story “The Doom of the Darnaways”<sup>xx</sup> is one of the cleverest of those in which Chesterton sets out to turn the Catholic superstition theme on its head. In this story Chesterton brings in many Gothic tropes: the family curse; the crumbling house; the supernatural portrait. Throughout the tale, it is Father Brown who insists on the rational - “I’m uncommonly keen on daylight”<sup>xxi</sup>. He forces the “spiritual duel between Darnaway and the demoniac picture”<sup>xxii</sup> (an unfortunate result of which is the death of Darnaway), by making the photograph confront the ancestral portrait. Father Brown’s intuition of the “uncanny”<sup>xxiii</sup> proves to have a synchronic rather than diachronic dimension, proving not to be the effect of likeness passed down through the centuries but of the fact he is witnessing the impersonation of Darnaway by one of his contemporaries. The most stunning tour de force in the tale, however, is Father Brown’s dismissal of the superstitions of “science”.

Much has been written recently about theories of degeneracy in relation to criminality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Certainly, medical theories about heredity provided much material with which to renew the Gothic theme of the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children. Wilkie Collins's *Mad Monkton* was one of the first to explore the theme, which also occurs, it has been argued, in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (where the morally-weak Lucy is the last in a degenerate line) as well as in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* where Gray himself is of a tainted line. Chesterton has Dr. Barnet update the Gothic curse, saying "I believe in one family curse, and that is the family constitution. I told you it was heredity, and they are all half mad. If you stagnate and breed in and brood in your own swamp like that, you're bound to degenerate whether you like it or not."<sup>xxiv</sup> For Chesterton, eugenic theories deny the criminal the privilege of blame, at the cost of his or her humanity, and Father Brown insists "murder is of the will, which God made free."<sup>xxv</sup> Linking eugenic theory and Gothic fatalism, Father Brown's reply depicts such "scientific" theorizing as the latest development of superstition, using Gothic imagery to do so ("I won't choose between two tunnels of subterranean superstition that both end in the dark"<sup>xxvi</sup>). His master stroke is to draw a parallel between "scientific superstition" and "magical superstition. They both seem to end in turning people into paralytics, who can't move their own legs or arms or save their own lives or souls."<sup>xxvii</sup> The terrible determinism of much Gothic, is revealed by Father Brown to be its own superstition. The Catholic priest looks to rational solutions; Gothic superstition is seen to be a Protestant and more lately, scientific creation.

Chesterton's Catholicism, though it could prove remarkably sympathetic to the qualities of the mediaeval world, is conceived very much in the present. His championing of the little man and fondness for his "sublime vulgarity"<sup>xxviii</sup> mean that his imagination thrives rather on the fantastic than the Gothic. In comparison Falkner's imagination was fired by Gothic Revivalist fantasies.

## Moonfleet

J. Meade Falkner's *Moonfleet* (1898)<sup>xxix</sup> (and, indeed, Falkner's entire oeuvre) is much more fully Gothic - interested in ambiance and Gothic imprisonment. Whereas Chesterton tends to address aspects of plot and stereo-typed Gothic characters, Falkner's interest extends to the rewriting of history. He rewrites the Gothic, keeping its structures but changing its ideological orientation. He tampers with the ideas and associations of fatherhood, authority, tradition and the past. He questions Gothic writing of the individual versus the community and is suspicious of conventional Gothic roll-calls of nation, race and empire. *Moonfleet* is a late nineteenth-century text in which Gothic meets romance, and literary Gothic meets Gothic revival.

*Moonfleet* is one of the classics of children's literature - a story of smuggling, diamonds and adventure. Starting in the tradition of *Jane Eyre* with a lonely orphan reading in the house of an unloving aunt, it quickly breaks with its literary predecessor by offering the spectacle of the corpse of fifteen-year-old David Block. From this point the hero and narrator John Trenchard, is flung from one claustrophobic space to another - from crypt and live burial (when the child-hero falls into a coffin, his fingers becoming entwined in the dead man's beard) to outlawdom and a cave in a quarry, and to the confines of a bucket in a well in Carisbrooke Castle and unjust imprisonment and a voyage under hatches in a slave ship. *Moonfleet* features a multiplicity of doubled father figures, a hero in distress, and, in the figure of Blackbeard, it has a villain from the past whose evil legacy is still at work. However, whilst ostensibly working within a Gothic plot Falkner is deliberately re-writing what he knows to be the Protestant, anti-Catholic underpinning of the Gothic.

*Moonfleet* like many Gothic texts is doubly distanced in time; it has two relevant pasts. Like Radcliffe's *The Italian* it is set in the 1750s. However, it reaches further back to a crime

committed in the Civil War. The second date, the Civil War date, is the locus of the construction of many of the book's crucial relationships, and it is constantly returned to. The Civil War proves to be a locus for many Gothic texts<sup>xxx</sup>. It is one of those cuspid periods - a time that supposedly saw the end to the vestigial Mediaevalism associated with the Divine Right of Kings, and the making of Whig government. It is a time associated with the pitting of cryptic Catholicism (in the form of Stuart sympathies) against Protestantism. These issues are to recur in the attempted Jacobite uprising of the 1740s - the period just prior to the work's main action.

Falkner's use of the Civil War period is interesting. The work's primal crime is committed not by the representative of absolutism but against him. Blackbeard - Colonel Mohune - betrays the trust of Charles I. He takes a precious diamond as reward for effecting the King's escape, then betrays Charles, hoping to retain the diamond. The unmentioned villain of course, also traitor and regicide, is the Whig hero, Oliver Cromwell. Blackbeard's crime, in un-Gothic fashion, is a crime against authority, and more specifically, Royal authority.

Blackbeard has no descendants. The Mohunes though constantly invoked through arcane signs in the text are not physically present. However, John Trenchard is the potential son and inheritor of Blackbeard. The doubling between the two is made specific at the moment that John, separated from Mohune only by the rotten wood of his coffin, falls onto the ghastly remains of the latter, disastrously closing the distance between them, and ending up with the length of black beard in his hand. From this point, Blackbeard's obsession is to be his own: he is to follow the same path, and even be involved in a killing similar to Mohune's murder of his servant. John's happy ending, however, is provided by his swerving from the path of Blackbeard and instead following his other father-figure (the suggestively Catholic) Elzevir Block.

Blackbeard is only one of the doubles of the good/bad fathers that proliferate in this text. Other fathers include the spiritual father Parson Glennie, Grace Maskew's father (who is responsible for the death of David Block) and the one and only Elzevir. Falkner's exploration of the father/child relationship is the focus of *Moonfleet*, and it is also one of his most radical re-writes of the Gothic agenda. The typical Gothic father has perhaps been most satisfactorily rendered by Goya's paintings of Saturn swallowing his son. In *Melmoth*, sons offer themselves as blood sacrifices, and aged fathers inadvertently attempt to starve their grandchildren. In *Moonfleet*, the relationship between Elzevir and John is one where the former protects, sacrifices self and performs super-human feats of strength and love, and where the latter is perpetually falling asleep in times of crisis.

Elzevir has something of God the father - and God the son - about him. It is possibly this theological dimension that lends the portrayal of the relationship its depth. *Moonfleet* does not have the Protestant concentration on the lonely individual, most impressively exemplified in what Richard Haslam has called the "Calvinist sublime"<sup>xxxix</sup> of *Melmoth* who tramps the earth in an agony of knowledge of predestined damnation, denied the comfort of good works and condemned to self-scrutiny and doubt. Instead, this Catholic-sympathizing text focuses on aspects of the Divinity itself. Elzevir, Christ-like, bears John up the zig-zag; he is his companion in slavery; he gives his life for him.

Social and temporal relations are very differently drawn in Catholic-sympathizing anti-Gothic works. Not only does the character possess a different sense of, and relation to the past, but relations with contemporaries are very different. In *Moonfleet* there is no true loneliness. We do not find the familiar patterns of the Calvinist sublime, with its emphasis on the besieged individual, conceived in opposition to and in lonely flight from the corrupt society around him or her. The very idea of innocence beleaguered by institutionalized vice is changed. Suddenly, instead of characters fleeing banditti we are set in the midst of communally-minded banditti. *Moonfleet*'s banditti are good-natured village smugglers. The

hero is one of them, and functions not in opposition to their communal endeavour, but with it. Indeed, it is when driven along the lonely path of obsession with the diamond, directed by individualism, that John Trenchard falls. Suffering Protestant individualism gives way to a Catholic emphasis on community and communion.

The turning to community means that the political topography of the Gothic changes. There is a new emphasis on the under-classes: John Trenchard is a surprisingly classless hero. The lines in *Moonfleet* are drawn between virtuous villagers and outsiders corrupted by the world of capitalist exchange. Money - wage-labour - is what distinguishes the outside world from the villagers. *Moonfleet* has a decided lack of Protestant work ethic. No one works, everyone gains. The inhabitants of *Moonfleet* operate outside a cash economy. They smuggle not for profit but for the goods themselves. Even in terms of necessities they are not dependent on the market. No one in *Moonfleet* has a trade - they fish - they take to the sea, and God gives them food. The only person in *Moonfleet* to go to market is the villainous Maskew. (Appropriately enough he buys a sole" - which he then throws in the face of the parson and ends up losing, as it is roasted over a hellish gridiron.) The only bad characters of the text are representatives of contemporary law and order: the murderous magistrate Maskew, the pompous impotent bailiff, the gaol-keeper. There is a lawlessness to *Moonfleet*. The contraband seems to offer the only alternative to the flawed capitalist world of law and money. And, significantly, among the lines that are re-drawn, as well as those of class, legality and community, is that of nationality. The contraband dissolves the old French/English Catholic/Protestant divide, and the French smugglers are one with the English. It is as if the banditti of former Gothic texts have become the site of Utopian values in the Catholic-sympathizing Gothic.

Catholicism is not mentioned directly in *Moonfleet*, only tangentially in that Elzevir is rumoured to be a Catholic. However, there are many minor details which testify to the text's Catholicism - such are the delight in moderate drinking, the trust in chance, the references to Dryden, the Latin quotations and the revoking of the explained supernatural in relation to the

legend of Blackbeard so that (Catholic) “superstition” is proved to be true after all. Like Chesterton, Falkner adds some discreet references to the sacrament of confession; death-bed confessions, the turning from self to priestly intercession are the only chances of salvation for Blackbeard and the Jewish diamond dealer. Falkner also rewrites the Gothic trope of imprisonment: the unjust imprisonment of Trenchard on the slave ship proves to be a salutary experience of Purgatory which allows him to expiate his sins.

Falkner’s depiction of his heroine, Grace Maskew, owes much to his Mariolatry. In Gothic texts in the Protestant tradition the heroine has a variety of roles to choose from. In Radcliffe she is the focus, the persecuted maiden struggling for escape and enlightenment. In texts from Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* to Wilkie Collins’s *The Haunted Hotel* the fair-haired woman stands as domesticated symbol of purity (even if only set up for the purposes of violation). One role she does not take is that of the resplendent Queen of Heaven. This is a peculiar fate reserved for the heroines of High Church writers. J. Meade Falkner had a special devotion to the Virgin. Restoring the church in Burford, he writes to his friend John Noble, almost welcoming the charges of “superstition”, “I am so strangely compounded that I look upon this (more than temporary, I hope) lull in our tribulations, as due to the intercessions of the Lady, whose house we have been setting to order.”<sup>xxxii</sup>

Grace Maskew, even by name, is associated with the Virgin. (“Hail Mary, Full of Grace”). She has an almost unapproachable self-protecting chastity, and a strange combination of age and youth, with the beauty of youth and a wisdom beyond her years. Grace, early in the book has granted clemency to the outlawed Elzevir and John even before they have asked for it, and she keeps alight the candle that is to guide John home. At the end of the text, Grace, appearing by Elzevir’s corpse grants forgiveness and offers advice on John’s passage to virtue.

Falkner works a change on the phenomenon of Gothic patterning by instituting Providential patterning. The patterns of *Melmoth* or *The Monk* or *The Mysteries of Udolpho* are terrifying. One stumbles from prison to prison. Each enclosure and the flight from it is duplicated by another. The victim is deprived of agency or, worse, as is the case in such a quintessentially Gothic text as Coleridge's *Christabel*, is will-less. In *Christabel*, events, words, epithets, relationships recur but there is no sense behind the terrifyingly straitened order. Falkner picks up on Gothic patterning. The narrative moves from prison to prison. There is a profusion of character doubling. There is also repetition of that which lies in the past - so that everything which is mentioned in the first chapter - Dutch-ness, the sea's undertow, Aladdin, the Mohune Y- recurs significantly in the narrative. Precursorship is integral to the structure of the book. Even the French prisoners-of-war at Carisbrooke Castle foreshadow the later condition of John and Elzevir.

Restoration is the key word. Blackbeard's legacy revolves round a misgotten treasure, which local tradition says should be used to restore the village almshouses. Picturesque Moonfleet is ready for restoration - not change. Its structures do not need amending. And at the close of the novel John Trenchard steps in with the proceeds of the diamond to finance charitable projects, including the restoration of the almshouses. His project is an updating of feudally-structured charity. Moonfleet is premised not on progress and flight from the feudal past, but on return and restoration. Blackbeard's fealty to his king is broken, this Sin must be atoned for. Blackbeard's atonement is fulfilled by John Trenchard in the rebuilding of the almshouses and the re-establishment of a benevolent patriarchy in the resolutely non-capitalist world of Moonfleet. The cryptic manuscripts that feature in the text provide a key to the past which will become a glorious future. Providence and restoration are the keys to John Trenchard's life. The pattern his life follows is that of sin, remorse, penance and restoration.

It is not only the diamond that is restored in this text - or the benign side of feudalism. The novel itself refuses the linear journey from crumbling mansion to enlightened modernity.

Instead it describes the circle of Providential Return. Moonfleet, even in its poverty, has something of the idyllic, and the only wish of those who have lived there is to return: which is what John and Elzevir do. Returns in other Gothic texts, such as Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, when Emily returns to the childhood idyll that is La Vallee, tend to be returns to enlightened modernity after an excursion into the feudal zones (of Montoni's *Udolpho*). Trenchard's journey is the other way round, and counters the movement of other Gothic texts. The happy endings of such texts as Lewis's *The Monk* (for Agnes and Raymond only!) or Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas* feature the desertion or destruction of the Gothic ancestral place. Moonfleet is to be rebuilt.

In the Gothic novel, fathers, and the past they represent, need to be escaped from. This reflects a Protestant view of the historical events which gave birth to the Reformation. Protestant identity is constituted by its break from the weight of a supposedly tyrannical history. In contrast, much of Catholic identity is based on the appeal to history and tradition. The Roman Church sees its legitimacy in the unbroken tradition from St Peter to the reigning Pontiff. Tradition and historically-validated authority constitute the 'truth' of Roman Catholicism. This, the pro-Catholic Gothic writer understands and sympathizes with: criticize history and the Catholic roots are severed. It is history that constitutes Catholic identity, and tradition is its guarantee. By the end of *Moonfleet* John Trenchard has been inscribed within history and his identity is not diminished but replenished by this inscription. He has become part of history and community.

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Chesterton and Falkner rewrite the Gothic very differently from each other. For Chesterton, the Gothic is essentially outdated and its present existence has more to do say about the nature of the Protestant establishment, its own bigotry and ideologically-useful superstitions. Accordingly his priest is very much a figure of the modern world, marrying rationality and

theology, able to tell master criminal, Flambeau ““You attacked reason..... It’s bad theology.””<sup>xxxiii</sup> Falkner, however, is committed to Victorian Gothic Revivalism. Sir Edmund Craster noted that “[h]e lived in a world of romance, of music, of book-collecting, and of medieval churchmanship.”<sup>xxxiv</sup> As a result Moonfleet, to some extent, could be seen not as Gothic but as anti-Gothic, in that the sentiments behind the Gothic revival could be said to be almost opposite to those of the Gothic novel; the impetus behind the latter being flight from (rather than revival of) the mediaeval. It is in accordance with Revivalist values of tradition, pre-capitalist community, and Restoration that Falkner rewrites Gothic tropes. As with Pugin, Falkner’s Revivalism is associated with Catholicism, as with William Morris Falkner’s ideal village lies outside a capitalist economy.

Falkner’s Revivalism is even more fully explored in his last published novel *The Nebuly Coat*, where he reworks some of the material of Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White*. In contrast to Collins’s novel, however, the young woman married to cover up the villain’s illegitimacy is not tortured but possessed of a “radiant content”<sup>xxxv</sup>. Most radically, the restoration of the church, and an act of self-sacrifice provide the possibility of redemption for the ambiguously-drawn Gothic villain.

As far as anyone is aware, unlike Chesterton, J. Meade Falkner was never officially received into the Catholic Church. However, in the course of his life he made many trips to the Vatican, received a medal from Pius XI for his researches in the Vatican library, and had friendships with many of the leading Catholic clergy, including one of the English Cardinals. He was intensely attracted to Roman Catholicism. Edmund Craster wrote “his natural vocation was that of a bachelor, and it would have been in no way surprising to hear that he had died in the Catholic faith in some Benedictine monastery”<sup>xxxvi</sup>. His friend Graves thought him “really, though secretly, a Papist.”<sup>xxxvii</sup>

A strange note can be added to the complicated business of Falkner's relation to Revivalism, myths of Providential Return, and by extension, his ultimate decision not to convert to Catholicism by consideration of the actual fate of the village of Fleet in Dorset. The village which Falkner depicts in his novel as lovingly restored in the mid eighteenth century was almost completely destroyed by floods in 1824.

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<sup>i</sup> Tarr, Mary Muriel, Sister, *Catholicism in Gothic Fiction: A Study of the Nature and Function of Catholic Materials in Gothic Fiction in England (1762 - 1820)* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1946)

<sup>ii</sup> Mighall, Robert, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)

<sup>iii</sup> Montague Summers Summers in *The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel* (London: Fortune Press, 1968) remarks on Charlotte Dacre's Jewish heritage, and Michael Sadleir in "The Northanger Novels: A Footnote to Jane Austen" *The English Association Pamphlet No. 68* (London, 1927) p. 22 suggests that Elinor Sleath may have been Catholic.

<sup>iv</sup> Baldick, Chris introduction to *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) p. xix

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid* p. xiii

<sup>vi</sup> Baldick, Chris, introduction to *Melmoth the Wanderer* by Charles Maturin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) p. xv

<sup>vii</sup> Sage, Victor *Horror Fiction in the Protestant Tradition* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988) p. xvi

<sup>viii</sup> Chesterton, G. K. *The Secret of Father Brown* (London: Cassell and co., 1927) p. 225

<sup>ix</sup> *Ibid* p. 225

<sup>x</sup> I do not know whether Chesterton knew Stetson's story. In a review of her work *Concerning Children* in *The Speaker* (March 9th 1901) he does not refer to her as a writer of prose fiction.

<sup>xi</sup> Chesterton, G. K. *The Secret of Father Brown* (London: Cassell and co., 1927) p.

<sup>xii</sup> *Ibid* p. 267

<sup>xiii</sup> *Ibid* p. 284

<sup>xiv</sup> *Ibid* pp. 295 - 6

<sup>xv</sup> *Ibid* p. 296

<sup>xvi</sup> Chesterton, G. K. *The Innocence of Father Brown* (1911) reprinted in *Father Brown* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1992)

<sup>xvii</sup> Chesterton, G. K. *The Secret of Father Brown* (London: Cassell and co., 1927)

<sup>xviii</sup> *Ibid* p. 25

<sup>xix</sup> Chesterton, G. K. *The Secret of Father Brown* (London: Cassell and co., 1927)

<sup>xx</sup> Chesterton, G. K. *The Incredulity of Father Brown* (London: Cassell and co., 1926)

<sup>xxi</sup> *Ibid* p. 246

<sup>xxii</sup> *Ibid* p. 248

<sup>xxiii</sup> *Ibid* p. 249

<sup>xxiv</sup> Chesterton, G. K. *The Incredulity of Father Brown*, (London: Cassell and co., 1926) pp. 253-4

<sup>xxv</sup> *Ibid* p. 255

<sup>xxvi</sup> *Ibid* p. 255

<sup>xxvii</sup> *Ibid* p. 254

<sup>xxviii</sup> Chesterton, G. K. "The Blue Cross" from *The Innocence of Father Brown* (1911) reprinted in *Father Brown* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1992) p. 13

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xxix Falkner, J. Meade *Moonfleet* (1898) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972)

xxx Chris Baldick in his introduction to *Melmoth the Wanderer* points out that the date of 1685 when the work is set is the period of the revoking of the Edict of Nantes (as well as the Glorious Revolution) a significant time for the Huguenot Maturins. However, it should also be noted that the work has many references to, and inset narratives set in the Civil War period. This period of history notable for the Cromwellian atrocities in Ireland is more complicated for Maturin, a Church of Ireland clergyman: a fact that the uneasy subtext of *Melmoth* often gestures toward.

xxxix Haslam, Richard "Maturin and the 'Calvinist sublime'" in *Gothick Origins and Innovations* ed. A. Lloyd-Smith and V. Sage (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994)

xxxii Warren, Kenneth, *John Meade Falkner, 1858-1932: A Paradoxical Life* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995)

xxxiii Chesterton, G. K. "The Blue Cross" from *The Innocence of Father Brown* (1911) reprinted in *Father Brown* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1992) p. 18

xxxiv Craster, Edmund, Sir, "John Meade Falkner: A Personal Note" in *The Nebuly Coat and The Lost Stradivarius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954) p. xi

xxxv Falkner, J. Meade *The Nebuly Coat and The Lost Stradivarius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954) p. 378

Craster, Edmund, Sir, "John Meade Falkner: A Personal Note" in *The Nebuly Coat and The Lost Stradivarius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954) xii

Warren, Kenneth, *John Meade Falkner, 1858-1932: A Paradoxical Life* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995)

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