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Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk: A Literary Patchwork*

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TALES OF WONDER! A print by James Gillray (1756-1815) and published by Hannah Humphrey on 1st February 1802 which portrays a group of women while reading Lewis's outrageous novel *The Monk*.

“The Absence of Love is the most abject Pain”
(*Nosferatu the Vampyre*, Werner Herzog, Ger, 1979)

Dedicated to my parents, my brother, Alessandro and Giulia.

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INTRODUCTION

This study aims at analysing one of the major controversial Gothic novels of the eighteenth century English publishing industry, that is Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* (1796).

First, it introduces Gothic fiction, considering the phenomenon of the so-called Gothic Revival which developed in connection with the rise of the novel thanks to writers such as Defoe, Richardson and Fielding, the new trading middle class, the revolutionary rationalistic thought, the emancipation of the literate and finally an easier access to books.

Secondly, it investigates the field of Gothic literature, which began to emerge from a rediscovery and a positive revaluation of a Medieval and a Renaissance past where human passions had always prevailed over rationality. The Gothic Novel flourished, therefore, as a reaction to the Enlightenment by conferring on supernatural, carnal appetites, imagination and irreligiousness the leading role.

Indeed, this thesis starts with the first Gothic novel, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) which relies on the discovery of a manuscript, a narrative technique later adopted by Clara Reeve and Sophia Lee, and it ends with the two different trends of the Gothic genre: the first one represented by Ann Radcliffe's novel in which morality, innocence and rationality finally triumph and the second one embracing the French libertine novel's features, such as the pact with diabolic forces, superstitious beliefs and the manifestation of sexual appetites that can be found in *Vathek* (1782) by Beckford and in *The Monk* by Lewis.

The main part of this research is entirely dedicated to Matthew Gregory Lewis's life and works, particularly his troubled relationship with his father and the pathological attachment to his mother which influenced his career as a playwright, novelist, poet, diplomat and as a benevolent landowner in Jamaica at the end of his existence.

It then provides a brief outline of the novel, a list of its borrowings from Goethe's *Faust*, Beckford and Radcliffe's writing, from some classical, English and Italian poets and from some Germanic and Spanish ballads, later adapted to the stage.

Moreover, this study illustrates the dominant themes, such as religious issues, the social hierarchy and sexual policies both of heterosexual and homosexual nature.

It also accounts for the scandal over Lewis's novel which has been accused of immorality, blasphemy and irreligiousness by Coleridge and Thomas James Mathias. Besides, *The Monk* was believed to have fomented a popular rebellion and to have crossed the predetermined social roles. Yet, Lewis's genius was also recognized by his contemporaries and by the Surrealist artists.

1. THE GOTHIC NOVEL

1.1 THE LITERARY CONTEXT

The Gothic Renaissance developed in England from the eighteenth century onwards in combination, as David Punter¹ correctly points out, with the rise of a new literary genre, the novel. What helped its flourishing were some substantial political, social and cultural changes. Firstly, the Industrial Revolution led to the birth of a new social order, the trading middle class which replaced the hierarchical society in which the aristocracy and the clergy had occupied up till then the highest rung of the social ladder.

Secondly, this new kind of thinking and running the world generated a growing interest in scientific and technical knowledge based on the French rationalist thought, better represented by the leading personalities of Diderot and Voltaire, who used the narrative genre in order to voice their opinions.

Finally, as a consequence, literacy gained ground thanks to the Lutheran Protestant Reformation and the Anglican schism from the Roman Catholic Church. The more people could read and write, the more the printing-houses appeared in a nation in which the cult of the bestseller has always been one of its distinctive features. However, given that book prices were exorbitant and only the upper classes could afford to buy them, circulating libraries suddenly appeared so that even the lower strata could gain easy access to reading paying a modest fee for the loan period. Writers themselves changed their position in a system where the phenomenon of patronage had always been powerful. Previously, they were closely linked to the royal court of England within an aristocratic environment, and then, from the eighteenth century on they were free from any kind of gratitude tie. The novelists began to individually commercialize their products for a wider book-buying public.

¹ Punter, David, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*, London and New York, Longman, 1980, p. 22.

In some way, the novel was the favourite literary genre of the time whose progenitor dated back, according to Ian Watt², to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* to the extent that he inaugurated a new realistic prose writing. This unprecedented portrayal of people's ordinary life was afterwards adopted by two other writers, namely Richardson and Fielding. While Richardson's *Clarissa Harlowe* (1748) is modelled on the epistolary novel in which emotions and feelings occupy a central position in the narrative, Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) goes back to the picaresque romance. It is the prototype of what would have been called "the novel of manners" accurately embodied by Jane Austen at the end of the century. It is worth noting that although the eighteenth century is known as the Age of Reason, the Enlightenment, many literary tendencies and tastes quickly caught on against the empirical and rational approach widely spread all over Europe. Science and intellect, no more religion and faith, were the main ways of explaining the universe. The triumph of passion over reason can be seen not merely in Richardson's works but also in what is called Gothic fiction. As Fred Botting argues, this tendency developed in a period which goes from the publication of *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole in 1764 to that of *Melmoth the Wanderer* by Charles Maturin in 1820³. However, as he claims it was in the 1790s that the great decade of the Gothic novel began. It was a flourishing literary period⁴ which witnessed the brilliant and successful career of two distinguished writers such as Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Gregory Lewis, whose unconventional novels, in some ways, spurred critics on to take a stand on their raising issues.

² Watt, Ian, *The Rise of the Novel: studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1957, p. 82.

³ Botting, Fred, *Gothic*, London and New York, Routledge, 1996, p. 15.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

1.2 THE GENERAL FEATURES

According to David Punter, the term “Gothic” first meant “to do with the Goths”, that is to say, with the barbarian inhabitants of Northern Europe, otherwise named “Teutonic” or “Germanic” who were traditionally in conflict with the Roman Empire and its culture and whose language was Gothic⁵. In later years, or rather at the beginning of the eighteenth century, this first meaning changed in relation to the shift in interest from geography to history, so as to acquire a negative sense as it referred to the so called Dark Ages, a medieval past hardly known among people. This past was synonymous with entropy, exaggeration, rudeness, savagery and darkness in stark contrast with the clearness and harmony of the classical civilization. The term “Gothic” became positive in the middle of the eighteenth century because of an interest centred on cultural principles. The medieval aesthetic culture was thus rediscovered and this taste for whatever was ancient was shown, for instance, in the appeal of medieval architecture and ruins which invaded both novels and writers’ residences⁶. Nowadays, the term refers both to the British and American horror fiction and to those European novels published between the 1760s and the 1820s which present common Gothic features, even though they contain different narrative devices.

Generally, the story has a third-person omniscient narrator and it is set in the past, in ruined castles with dark and unknown dungeons or in convents and abbeys with secret and underground passageways haunted by ghosts, vampires, monsters, werewolves, demons, corpses or skeletons. The geographical location is often in Italy or Spain of the past, two catholic and superstitious countries where the dimension of time is mingled with the dimension of space. Geographically speaking, Italy and Spain are objects of a physical

⁵ Punter, *cit.*, p. 5.

⁶ Among the most famous Gothic buildings one could remember Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill and William Beckford’s Fonthill.

journey which allow the rediscovery of a dim and distant past. If it is an outdoor setting, dark forests and majestic mountains appear in the literary scenery. This rocky and sinister landscape evokes sublime emotions and feelings which are referred to in Edmund Burke's essay entitled *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), where the author highlights the dissimilarities between what is beautiful and what is sublime. The first concept is given by small and delicate objects and it inspires a warm and lovely feeling, whereas the second one is produced by dark and vast objects which arouse terrible and horrible passions overstepping the boundaries of human rationality. The sublimity of nature emanates in the observer sentiments of fear, terror, awe and wonder which stimulate his or her overindulged imagination. Characters encounter the realms of fantasy through supernatural and mysterious events, omens, portents and visions and by giving way to excessive feelings such as vice, violence, sexual desires and selfish ambitions. The chief protagonists are actually heroes or heroines who are threatened by malevolent tyrants otherwise named villains or hindered by parents who interfere in their children's love affairs.

In the following Gothic and horror novels, both setting and characters change according to the progress of science and technology, in particular the Darwinian's evolution of species. The urban and modern world pervades the scene where industrial buildings, working people and crowded streets gather and where the present or future are the new temporal dimensions of the narrative. In addition to these recurrent figures, monsters, vampires, mad scientists with their double and wicked personality can be found. The latter show the alienation of man from his psyche and from the nineteenth century bourgeois society.

As to narrative devices, many writers, starting from Horace Walpole, employed the strategy of the "discovered manuscript", that is an authentic written material which the author claims to be the original source of the story. This narrative technique was adopted by novelists for the mere purpose of defending themselves against the critics' attacks and

of gaining credibility for their literary works. The risks of breaking the eighteenth century social and moral rules were indeed the primary reasons of censure of romances, tales and novels. Gothic fiction was charged with stimulating excessive emotions so as to subvert the norms of exemplary social behaviour and attitudes. Gothic productions are, according to Fred Botting, “writings of excess” in which virtue yields to vice, reason to desire and law to tyranny⁷. Their plots challenge the Enlightenment patterns based on rationality and morality preferring a remote and idealized past imbued with supernatural events, social transgressions, fancy thoughts, superstitious beliefs, spiritual corruption, and religious evil. This challenging attitude against the eighteenth century aesthetic values mirrored the fears and anxieties which overwhelmed the whole of Europe, first and foremost the French Revolution. In fact, according to the thinking of that time it represented the downfall of any certainty, the blind rage of humankind, the overthrow of a system thought to be unshakeable and solid, so it heightened feelings of terror, dismay, doubt, uncertainty, fear and trouble.

In dealing with irrationality, immorality and darkness, the Gothic period set a trend which was successful for over two centuries. As a consequence of this new era, from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, a high number of Gothic novels were published and read⁸.

1.3 THE FIRST GOTHIC ROMANCE

The first Gothic romance was Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* which was published in 1764⁹. From the very beginning of the book, one can notice the close link with

⁷ Botting, *cit.*, p. 1.

⁸ This study sets out to highlight some selected examples of the Gothic genre, although they are not the only ones available on the publishing market.

⁹ It is worth mentioning what Fred Botting thinks of the term “Gothic romance”: “In discussion of eighteenth-century fiction, the term ‘Gothic romance’ is more applicable than ‘Gothic novel’ as it highlights the link between medieval romances, the romantic narratives of love, chivalry and adventure, that were imported from France from the late seventeenth century onwards, and the tales that in the later eighteenth century were classified as ‘Gothic’” (Botting, *cit.*, p. 24).

an ancient past which up to then had been considered unworthy of being revived. In the Preface to the first edition (24 December 1764) the author maintains that he had found a book, printed at Naples in 1529, in the library of an ancient Catholic family from Northern England and that he translated the document faithfully, without doctoring neither the historical period (twelfth and thirteenth century), nor the mysterious incidents supposed to have occurred at the time of the Crusades¹⁰. Then, Walpole meditates on the style of the work stressing the author's predisposition towards the supernatural events, forces and powers. These last were banned from writings at the time when Walpole wrote and for this reason he invites the readership to keep on reading and imagining itself in that bygone age¹¹. Furthermore, in the preface to the second edition (1765), subtitled *A Gothic Story*, Walpole claimed to be the real author of the novel and that he has attempted to invent a new kind of romance by mingling ancient and modern romance styles in which imagination and mystery counteract with probability and reality¹².

The Castle of Otranto opens with a bleak prophecy about the legitimacy of the throne from which a series of tragic events derive¹³. Indeed, it tells the story of a wicked tyrant, Manfred, Prince of Otranto, who has arranged the marriage between his fifteen-year-old

¹⁰ "The following work was found in the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England. It was printed at Naples, in the black letter, in the year 1529. How much sooner it was written does not appear. The principal incidents are such as were believed in the darkest ages of christianity; but the language and conduct have nothing that favours of barbarism. The style is the purest Italian. If the story was written near the time when it is supposed to have happened, it must have been between 1095, the æra of the first crusade, and 1243, the date of the last, or not long afterwards" (Walpole, Horace, *Il Castello di Otranto: una storia gotica, con testo originale a fronte*, Milano, Oscar Mondadori, 2002, p. 2).

¹¹ "Miracles, visions, necromancy, dreams, and other preternatural events, are exploded now even from romances. That was not the case when our author wrote; much less when the story itself is supposed to have happened. Belief in every kind of prodigy was so establish in those dark ages, that an author would not be faithful to the manners of the times who should omit all mention of them" (*ibid.*, p. 4).

¹² "The favourable manner in which this little piece has been received by the public, calls upon the author to explain the grounds on which he composed it. But before he opens those motives, it is fit that he should ask pardon of his readers for having offered his work to them under the borrowed personage of a translator. As diffidence of his own abilities, and the novelty of the attempt, were his sole inducements to assume that disguise, he flatters himself he shall appear excusable. He resigned his performance to the impartial judgement of the public; determined to let it perish in obscurity, if disapproved; nor meaning to avow such a trifle, unless better judges should pronounce that he might own it without a blush. It was an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been copied with success" (*ibid.*, p. 12).

¹³ "[...] the castle and lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it" (*ibid.*, p. 30).

son, Conrad, and the young daughter of the Marquis of Vicenza, Isabella. Unfortunately, Conrad prematurely dies under the strain of a gigantic heaven-sent helmet leaving both his parents and the guests dumbfounded. Manfred, for fear of remaining without an heir, resolves to divorce his wife Hippolita and marry the poor defenceless Isabella.

Absolutely terrified at the thought of getting involved in the love affair, Isabella flees from the castle to avoid Manfred's clutches. She is helped by Theodore, a brave peasant whose presence seems to recall the previous ruler of Manfred's domain, the old lord Alfonso. However, the youth is captured but soon after freed by the eighteen-year-old Manfred's daughter Matilda who falls in love with him.

At this point, the narration is filled with supernatural events which haunt the castle and frighten all those who live in it, such as some fragments of a colossal armour¹⁴, a portrait which sees and leaves its panel to walk about the castle¹⁵, a thunderclap which destroys the walls of the building, the apparition of an armoured and gigantic Alfonso which ascends towards a rainy heaven letting the crowd see the form of Saint Nicholas¹⁶.

¹⁴ "It was Diego saw it, my lord, it was not I, replied Jaquez; I only heard the noise. Diego had no sooner opened the door, than he cried out and ran back – I ran back too, and said Is it the ghost? The ghost! No, no, said Diego, and his hair stood on end – it is a giant, I believe; he is all clad in armour, for I saw his foot and part of his leg, and they are as large as the helmet below in the court; [...] the gigantic sword burst from the supporters, and, falling to the ground opposite to the helmet, remained immovable. Manfred, almost hardened to preternatural appearances, surmounted the shock of this new prodigy; and returning to the hall, where by this time the feast was ready, he invited his silent guests to take their places; [...] At that instant Bianca burst into the room, with a wildness in her look and gestures that spoke the utmost terror. Oh! my lord, my lord! cried she, we are all undone! It is come again! it is come again! – What is come again? cried Manfred amazed. – Oh! the hand! the giant! the hand! – Support me! I am terrified out of my senses, cried Bianca; [...] So, as I was rubbing the ring – I am sure I had not gone up three steps, but I heard the rattling of armour; for all the world such a clatter, as Diego says he heard when the giant turned him about in the gallery-chamber; [...] I saw upon the uppermost banister of the great stairs a hand in armour as big, as big" (*ibid.*, pp. 70-140-142-222-224-226-228).

¹⁵ "At that instant the portrait of his grandfather, which hung over the bench where they had been sitting, uttered a deep sigh and heaved its breast. [...] Manfred, distracted between the flight of Isabella, who had now reached the stairs, and his inability to keep his eyes from the picture, which began to move, had however advanced some steps after her, still looking backwards on the portrait, when he saw it quit its panel, and descend on the floor with a grave and melancholy air" (*ibid.*, p. 48).

¹⁶ "The moment Theodore appeared, the walls of the castle behind Manfred were thrown down with a mighty force, and the form of Alfonso, dilated to an immense magnitude, appeared in the centre of the ruins. Behold in Theodore, the true heir of Alfonso! said the vision: and having pronounced those words, accompanied by a clap of thunder, it ascended solemnly towards heaven, where the clouds parting asunder, the form of saint Nicholas was seen" (*ibid.*, p. 248).

Moreover, Father Jerome discovers, thanks to the scar of a bloody arrow covering Theodore's shoulder, that he is his long-lost son. Hence, the youth is the lawful prince of Otranto because the holy father had married his mother, that is Alfonso's daughter. Believing that Isabella is in danger, Theodore wounds a knight, but he later learns that his adversary is her father, Frederic.

At the end of the story, Manfred accidentally murders his daughter Matilda, he abdicates and retires with his wife Hippolita to a nearby convent, whereas Theodore marries Isabella, thus restoring the principality to its legitimate bloodline.

Horace Walpole opened the way for the proliferation and development of the Gothic fiction. Some writers followed in Walpole's footsteps adopting the same technical devices but providing other narrative details of minor importance. Others brought considerable variations within a genre bound to become widely spread.

1.4 CLARA REEVE'S FICTION

Clara Reeve's first work of fiction was *The Champion of Virtue. A Gothic Story* brought out anonymously in 1777 and then revised the year later by changing the title in *The Old English Baron* and by declaring her authorship. It was another example of the so-called romance revival because it employs Horace Walpole's literary strategies¹⁷, notably the "discovered manuscript"¹⁸, the supernatural agency¹⁹ and the historical setting²⁰. However,

¹⁷ In the preface to the second edition of the novel, from the very beginning Reeve stated that "This Story is the literary offspring of the Castle of Otranto, written upon the same plan, with a design to unite the most attractive and interesting circumstances of the ancient Romance and modern Novel, at the same time it assumes a character and manner of its own, that differs from both; it is distinguished by the appellation of a Gothic Story, being a picture of Gothic times and manners" (Reeve, Clara, *Preface to the Second Edition in The Old English Baron*, USA, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 2).

¹⁸ In *The Champion of Virtue's* 'Address to the Reader', Clara Reeve claimed to be the translator of a "manuscript in the old English language [...] which might afford entertainment to those who delight in stories of this kind". She also avowed openly that she "transcribed, or rather translated a few sheets of it" (Reeve, Clara, *Appendix I in The Old English Baron, cit.*, p. 139).

¹⁹ "Soon after, it was reported that the Castle was haunted, and that the ghosts of Lord and Lady Lovel had been seen by several of the servants. Whoever went into this apartment were terrified by uncommon noises and strange appearances; at length this apartment was wholly shut up, and the servants were forbid to enter

unlike her predecessors, she seems to have restored credibility to the story because neither past nor the supernatural are terrifying or frightening. In fact, according to Reeve, “we can conceive, and allow for, the appearance of a ghost; we can even dispense with an enchanted sword and helmet; but then they must keep within certain limits of credibility”²¹. She is alleged to have preserved the moral customs of eighteenth century English society because, as Fred Botting states, in the novel past and present are not in collision with each other, but in a sort of “historical continuity”²². Furthermore, Clara Reeve came from a different social milieu. She belonged to the middle-class and was the daughter of a curate in Ipswich, while Walpole was an aristocrat who had become Earl of Oxford. Their novels portray thereby characters which reflect the same social ladder as their creators. Therefore, in Reeve the hero triumphs for his virtue and moral qualities, whereas in Walpole for a claimed rightful inheritance.

The Old English Baron (1778) takes place during the reign of Henry VI in the 1430s and it develops round the story of Edmund Twyford, the son of a cottager in the nearby village engaged as a steward to the Baron Fitz-Owen’s children. The Baron’s parentage lives in a castle whose previous owner was Arthur Lord Lover, a relative of the Baron’s family, and whose apartments are strongly linked to Edmund’s past. Edmund’s military skills arouse

it, or to talk of anything related to it”; “At the hour of twelve they heard the same groans as the night before in the lower apartment; but, being somewhat familiarized to it, they were not so strongly affected”; “As they [Markham and Wenlock] stood with their fists clenched, on a sudden they were alarmed with a dismal groan from the room underneath. They stood like statues petrified by fear, yet listening with trembling expectation: A second groan increased their consternation; and, soon after, a third completed it. [...] A pale glimmering light appeared at the door from the staircase, and a man in complete armour entered the room. [...] The terror was universal [...] We have seen the ghost!” (*ibid.*, pp. 29-60-68-69).

²⁰ The first lines of the novel recite how follows: “In the minority of Henry the Sixth, King of England, when the renowned John Duke of Bedford was Regent of France, and Humphrey the good Duke of Gloucester was Protector of England, a worthy Knight, called Sir Philip Harclay, returned from his travels to England, his native country. He had served under the glorious King Henry the Fifth with distinguished valour, had acquired an honourable fame, and was no less esteemed for Christian values than for deeds of chivalry. After the death of his Prince, he entered into the service of the Greek Emperor, and distinguished his courage against the encroachments of the Saracens”. Later in the novel the reader can learn that “About this time died the great Duke of Bedford, to the irreparable loss of the English nation. He was succeeded by Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, as Regent of France, of which great part had revolted to Charles the Dauphin” (*ibid.*, pp. 5-22).

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²² Botting, *cit.*, p. 55.

envy within the household and he is sent to sleep in these locked rooms where loud moans and bright lights lead him to dream of a knight and a lady who seem to be his parents. Hence, Edmund starts to look for further information concerning his family history and after fighting a feudal combat, he discovers his noble birth. Finally, Edmund marries the Baron's daughter, Lady Emma, and becomes the legitimate owner of the castle, so that propriety, morality and domestic harmony are rightly restored.

1.5 DOMESTICITY AND HISTORICAL NOVEL IN SOPHIA LEE

The concept of "domesticity" was also explored by another female novelist, Sophia Lee, who wrote the first volume of *The Recess* six years later, in 1783²³. On the one hand, she adopted Walpole's technical device of the discovered manuscript²⁴, on the other she alternatively applied through letters a subjective perspective²⁵.

By setting her novel during the Elizabethan and Jacobean age and by constructing a plot in which fictitious characters interact with real ones²⁶, Sophia Lee rarely uses the supernatural in order to cause panic. On the contrary, the painful emotions that the female characters experience are stirred up by noblemen and bandits coming from the outside world. Thus, women are always in great peril in a world ruled by brutal men. The domestic sphere is the only shelter from dangerous threats but neither family nor virtue can completely keep danger away²⁷.

²³ The two last volumes of the novel were added in 1785.

²⁴ In the *Advertisement* which prefaces the novel itself, Sophia Lee maintained: "NOT being permitted to publish the means which enriched me with the manuscript from whence the following tale is extracted, its simplicity alone can authenticate it" (Lee, Sophia, *The Recess; or, A Tale of Other Times*, USA, University Press of Kentucky, 2000, p. 5).

²⁵ The novel is mainly divided in two parts except for some pages dedicated to Lady Pembroke's epistles: the first is a memoir-letter written by the elder Matilda and addressed to her sister Ellinor, the second is the epistolary narration of Ellinor to her twin sister. The novel ends with the return of Matilda's account.

²⁶ The historical figures who inhabit *The Recess* are: Mary Queen of Scots, Elizabeth Tudor, Lord Essex, Lord Leicester and Sir Philip Sidney.

²⁷ One could quote some examples: "[...] we learnt there was a terrible large place called the world, where a few haughty individuals commanded miserable millions, whom a few artful ones made so; that Providence had graciously rescued us from both, nor could we ever be sufficiently grateful"; "The interval we passed in

The Recess focuses on the adventures of two twin sisters, Matilda and Ellinor, believed to be the illegitimate daughters of Mary Queen of Scots, by her secret marriage to the Duke of Norfolk. For this reason, they have been concealed from the populace in underground passageways of a gloomy abbey and brought up by a foster mother, Mrs Marlow, until the marriageable age. Matilda, the eldest, marries one of Elizabeth's favourites, Lord Leicester, with whom she has a little girl, named Mary. After her husband's death, she is carried to Jamaica by a keen admirer where she is confined to imprisonment. Once her daughter has grown up, she manages to go back to England in search of her sister, Ellinor, but a series of dramatic incidents lead to the captivity of Mary and her death by poison. The younger twin, Ellinor, falls in love with Lord Essex, another favourite of the queen. Unfortunately, their union is quickly hindered by the wicked Elizabeth who persuades her to marry Lord Arlington. When her husband expires, she moves to Ireland in order to join Essex who meanwhile has returned to England. Ellinor begins to follow him but she suddenly discovers that he is dead. The death of her still-beloved drives her to madness and she sinks into such a deep melancholy that she soon breathes her last.

According to David Punter, Sophia Lee was clever at covering a peculiar historical period which follows the French historical novel, better represented by the abbé Prévost and Baculard d'Arnaud²⁸. Furthermore, she was able to let some themes emerge which would be taken up by the following Gothic authors. These include the problem of the Catholic religion, the Jacobites and the Elizabethan age.

little useful works, or in conversation with our mamma, whose only employment was that of forming our minds, for the world we were taught to dread. – *She* was our world [...]; “[...] we had never found a door except those common to the family, and which shut us from the world”; “[...] man lived in a continual warfare with every thing in creation, even to his own species!”; “As much a stranger to the world as if just born into it, how could I promise to myself years as peaceful as I had experienced in the Recess?”; “The fate of my mother now arose more strongly to my mind. ‘Ah! why,’ thought I, ‘did I leave the happy solitude in which she placed me, only to ruin the object of my affections, and deliver myself up to an inexorable tyrant, who can wreak her malice without even being suspected!’” (Lee, *cit.*, pp. 8-9-13-66-81).

²⁸ Punter, *cit.*, p. 57.

1.6 RADCLIFFE

It is worth pointing out that, at the end of the eighteenth century, Gothic fiction began to thrive on two staple strands.

On the one hand, it became the standard “Gothic genre” to all intents and purposes, akin to Walpole’s precepts and better represented by a middle-class woman, Ann Radcliffe, whose popular novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) was one of the most circulating bestsellers at the time. On the other hand, the Gothic novel’s illusionistic narrative techniques mingled with the contents of the French libertine novel in order to playfully attack the established English government, notably religious orthodoxy and ethics. Imbued with these controversial topics, Gothic fiction thirty years later witnessed the apparition of the knotty work by Matthew Gregory, *The Monk*.

As regards Ann Radcliffe’s tribute to the Gothic novel, David Punter claims that the strength of *Udolpho* lies in “character psychology, symbolic intensification and in an extraordinary use of suspense and doubt which constantly blurs the boundaries of reality and fantasy”²⁹. More often than not, her main characters are heroines who live in France or Italy and wander around ruined castles and abbeys, hidden underground passageways or around dark forests and mountainous regions. The historical background is the Middle Ages or the Renaissance where poor defenceless girls seized with spectral and supernatural visions are usually persecuted by wicked and cruel aristocrats, bandits and monks³⁰. By trembling with fear, female characters often faint, although their dismay is a figment of their fevered imagination. First of all, both the protagonists and the readers are deceived and terrified by ghostly apparitions and then they are reassured by a rational

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

³⁰ *The Italian* (1797), for instance, is set in Naples and tells the story about the innocent Ellena of Rosalba who is imprisoned in a convent by the diabolical and unscrupulous monk Schedoni for preventing her marriage with the noble Vincenzo of Vivaldi. Her life is put at risk throughout the novel but finally they happily marry.

explanation. Nonetheless, the excessive sensibility in which her heroines overindulge show how dangerous extreme passions and emotions could be³¹. However, Radcliffe's novels conclude with a happy ending where virtue and domestic harmony triumph against adversities thanks to the reliance on providence.

The Mysteries of Udolpho is a four-volume novel and its story develops round the young woman, Emily St. Aubert, who lives at the chateau at La Vallé in Gascony with her all-loving parents. Unfortunately, her mother soon dies and, during a journey made for recuperative purposes, her father follows, leaving Emily in a bad financial condition at the mercy of her father's selfish sister, Madame Cheron. In that short period spent together, Emily and her father meet a youth, Valancourt, with whom she falls in love. At Toulouse, their relationship is encouraged by Emily's aunt for purely economic reasons. However, no sooner has Madame Cheron married the Italian nobleman, Montoni, than their courtship is obstructed. Indeed, the Marquis moves with the two women to Venice where Emily meets Count Morano, a friend of Montoni, whom she almost marries against her wishes, still for economic purposes. As Morano is discovered to be on the brink of financial ruin, Montoni decides to take Emily and her aunt to his castle of Udolpho in the Apennines. Thenceforth Morano tries to release Emily from Udolpho, but she refuses to follow him because she is still in love with Valancourt. When Montoni discovers Morano's arrangement, he challenges the count to a duel, wounding him and then driving him away from his estate. During the stay at Udolpho, Madame Cheron is threatened to sign her properties in Toulouse over to her husband, which after her death would have been transferred to

³¹ Ann Radcliffe disliked the excessive passions of contemporary literature and this is mildly said in one of Emily's father warnings: "Above all, my dear Emily, do not indulge in the pride of fine feeling, the romantic error of amiable minds. Those, who really possess sensibility, ought early to be taught, that it is a dangerous quality, which is continually extracting the excess of misery, or delight, from very surrounding circumstance. And, since, in our passage through this world, painful circumstances occur more frequently than pleasing ones, and since our sense of evil is, I fear, more acute than our sense of good, we become the victims of our feelings, unless we can in some degree command them. [...] if you yield to this vanity, your happiness is lost forever. Always remember how much more valuable is the strength of fortitude, than the grace of sensibility" (Radcliffe, Ann, *The Mysteries of Udolpho: a Romance*, London, Penguin Books, 2001, pp. 78-79).

Emily. Madame Cheron refuses with resolution and soon she dies because of her husband's roughness. Emily is subjected to many terrifying and supernatural events³² which are later revealed³³. Nevertheless, she flees from the castle towards the chateau Le Blanc, in France, thanks to the help of a prisoner, Du Pont, and the servants Ludovico and Annette. This place does not comfort the young girl as it seems to have sinister connections with her family and besides it is haunted by ghostly apparitions which trouble Emily's weak heart³⁴. In the end, though Emily learns that Valancourt has lost his wealth and has been prey to social vices in Paris, she marries him and takes possession of all her worldly goods.

Ann Radcliffe's novel confers on terror the leading part in the narrative to the extent that it "expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life"³⁵ and leads to sublime emotions. In parallel with Edmund Burke's above-mentioned aesthetic theory on the sublime, Radcliffe shows how her heroines are choked with terrible emotions caused by their excessive predisposition towards the power of imagination³⁶. By experiencing

³² "She paused again, and then, with a timid hand, lifted the veil; but instantly let it fall—perceiving that what it had concealed was no picture, and, before she could leave the chamber, she dropped senseless on the floor"; [...] she heard a low moaning at no great distance, and, having paused a moment, she heard it again and distinctly"; "While Emily kept her eyes fixed on the spot, she saw the door move, and then slowly open, and perceived something enter the room, but the extreme duskiess prevented her distinguishing what it was"; "She seized it (*dark curtain*), in a fit of desperation, and drew it aside. Beyond, appeared a corpse, stretched on a kind of low couch, which was crimsoned with human blood, as was the floor beneath"; "[...] she observed the figure start away, and glide down the rampart, after which it was soon lost in the obscurity of night. Emily [...] retired within her chamber, [...] scarcely doubting that she had witnessed a supernatural appearance" (*ibid.*, pp. 236-244-247-329-330-337).

³³ Once she has experienced a tremendous sense of awe, Emily states: "I perceive that all old mansions are haunted; I am lately come from a place of wonders; but unluckily, since I left it, I have heard almost all of them explained" (*ibid.*, p. 461).

³⁴ "[...] the ghastly countenance she had seen was nothing human, but some dreadful apparition"; "Emily saw a figure emerge from the shade of the woods and pass along the bank, at some little distance before her"; "[...] she (*Annette*) affirmed, that, [...] she had seen an apparition on the second landing-place" (*ibid.*, pp. 505-511).

³⁵ Radcliffe, Ann, *On the Supernatural in Poetry*, in *The New Monthly Magazine*, 7, 1826, pp. 145-52.

³⁶ Emily, the heroine of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* often fancies: "As Emily timidly surveyed them, she remembered the scene of the preceding morning, and again almost fancied herself surrounded by banditti"; "The image of her aunt murdered—murdered, perhaps, by the hand of Montoni, rose to her mind; she trembled, gasped for breath [...]"; "All the horrid apprehensions, that had lately assailed her, returned at this instant with redoubled force, and no longer appeared like the exaggerations of a timid spirit, but seemed to have been sent to warn her of her fate. She now did not doubt, that Madame Montoni had been murdered, perhaps in this very chamber; or that she herself was brought hither for the same purpose"; "Thus, enquiry

exaggerated fears, characters are able to learn the virtue of a greater moderation of mind. In fact, Radcliffe focuses on the triumph of innocence and domestic harmony over corruption and social violence³⁷ and on the elegant style, for which reasons she has always been praised by critics.

1.7 BECKFORD

Other Gothic works which took inspiration from the libertine novel, introducing outrageous themes as the pact with the devil, superstitious religious beliefs and carnal desires were given a different reception.

Vathek, by William Beckford, was published first in France in 1782 and then translated into English four years later. The fact that an English author wrote in French shows how important was the connection between English and French culture at the time, but it also shows that the intention was to speak to a special reader.

Vathek is set in a fanciful Oriental surrounded by odd and gigantic buildings very similar to Beckford's mansion at Fonthill Abbey. It was not completely considered a Gothic novel for the taste of the exotic which it displays, nevertheless, the themes it explores are doubtlessly purely Gothic. Both the supernatural machinery and the terrifying emotions³⁸

only perplexed her. Who, or what, it could be that haunted this lonely hour, complaining in such doleful accents and in such sweet music [...] and imagination again assumed her empire, and roused the mysteries of superstition"; "But her imagination was inflamed, while her judgement was not enlightened, and terrors of superstition again pervaded her mind" (Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, cit., pp. 294-304-328-337-350).

³⁷ One could quote how *The Mysteries of Udolpho* ends: "O! useful may it be to have shewn, that, though the vicious can sometimes pour affliction upon the good, their power is transient and their punishment certain; and that innocence, though oppressed by injustice, shall, supported by patience, finally triumph over misfortune!" (*ibid.*, p. 632).

³⁸ "Terrifying as these prodigies were, this impression upon him was no more than momentary, and served only to stimulate his love of the marvellous"; "A sound, like that which arises from the filling of baths, struck her ear at the same time. She continued ascending, and discovered large wax torches in full blaze, planted here and there in the fissures of the rock. This appearance filled her with fear, whilst the subtle and potent odour, which the torches exhaled, caused her to sink, almost lifeless, at the entrance of the grot"; "Vathek and Nouronihar, frozen with terror, at a sight so baleful, demanded of the Giaour what these appearances might mean; and, why these ambulating spectres never withdrew their hands from their hearts?" (Beckford, William, *Vathek*, Great Britain, Oxford University Press, 1980, pp. 22-70-110).

play an important role in the story especially when they are intensified by sexual pleasures.

Similar to Walpole, Beckford prefers supernatural events and sublime emotions rather than rational and moral explanations. Like Walpole he favours a fantastic Mediterranean or oriental Middle Ages. Moreover, he introduces in the novel the concept of homosexuality and bisexuality³⁹, which may be also found in the pornography of the eighteenth century literary tradition. Particularly, Beckford was most interested in homosexual love because he was a homosexual which had always tried to keep secret this thorny issue.

The hero is Caliph Vathek, an Eastern tyrant who strikes fear into his subjects. He is the victim of his own consuming passions and an adept in the occult sciences, finally condemned to eternal damnation. The plot tells the story of a stranger with hideous features who arrives at Samarah and finds hospitality in Caliph Vathek's palace. He asserts that he is a merchant of precious goods coming from an unknown region of India but, as the story unfolds, he is an emissary of the devil Eblis. Vathek, who is bewitched by the stranger's astonishing secrets, decides to call him Giaour which means blasphemer. Since Caliph wants Giaour to reveal his magic powers and the existence of "the Palace of Subterraneous Fire" where Soliman Ben Daoud dwells, he asks him to renounce the teachings of Islam and to sacrifice fifty children of his reign. Caliph Vathek agrees and fulfils the stranger's terrible wish. After having committed the criminal rite, he takes refuge in the tower of his palace, thanks to the help of his mother, Carathis, in order to avoid the children's parents revenge. He and his mother set fire to the palace to ingratiate themselves with Giaour but the inhabitants of Samarah, unaware of what is happening, rush up to Caliph Vathek's aid. However, his cruelty and his thirst for supernatural powers

³⁹ "The Caliph, delighted to see his desires accomplished in part, [...] leaped upon the neck of the frightful Indian, and kissed his horrid mouth and hollow cheeks, as though they had been the coral lips and the lilies and roses of his most beautiful wives"; Nouronihar and Gulchenrouz "had the same tastes and amusements; the same long, languishing looks; the same tresses; the same fair complexions; and, when Gulchenrouz appeared in the dress of his cousin, he seemed to be more feminine than even herself" (*ibid.*, pp. 15-66).

bring him to murder some of them for discovering the place where he can uncover the Giaour's esoteric mysteries. Following the stranger's instructions, Caliph Vathek goes towards Istakhar by caravan and during the trip he makes the acquaintance of Emir Fakreddin and her daughter with whom he falls in love. Nouronihar was already destined to become the future bride of Gulchenrouz, Emir's nephew, Vathek seduces her and leads her to eternal damnation. Whereupon, a Genii tries to persuade Caliph Vathek to go back home and not to trust Eblis, the ruler of Hell. Vathek refuses to follow the Genii's advice and he is finally punished for his wild passions, terrible deeds and burning ambition but especially for having overstepped the boundaries of human knowledge and supernatural forces⁴⁰.

⁴⁰ "Such (to wander in an eternity of unabating anguish) was, and such should be, the punishment of unrestrained passions and atrocious deeds! Such shall be, the chastisement of that blind curiosity, which would transgress those bounds the wisdom of the Creator has prescribed to human knowledge; and such the dreadful disappointment of that restless ambition, which, aiming at discoveries reserved for beings of a supernatural order, perceives not, through its infatuated pride, that the condition of man upon earth is to be – humble and ignorant" (*ibid.*, p. 120).

2. THE LIFE OF MATTHEW GREGORY LEWIS

The chapter analyses Matthew Gregory Lewis's biography. His relationship with his parents was stormy. He was an alleged homosexual which influenced his career as a novelist, playwright, poet and composer. He was also a liberal-slave owner in the eighteenth and nineteenth century English society⁴¹.

2.1 HIS PARENTS' SEPARATION

Matthew Gregory Lewis was born on 9 July 1775 and he was the eldest child of Matthew Lewis and Frances Maria Sewell, both wealthy landowners in England and Jamaica. His parents married on 22 February 1773 and had three other children: Fanny Maria, Barrington and Sophia Elizabeth. However, the couple did not get on well and, although there were some conflicting petitions about their breakup, the marriage ended in divorce⁴². Before the judicial separation, which happened on 27 February 1783, Mrs Lewis received from her husband six hundred pounds a year, the bare essentials to maintain herself and her children. In addition, Matthew Lewis allowed her to dwell in one of his mansions but in June or July 1781, Frances Maria Sewell eloped with her lover, a musician named Samuel Harrison, staying first in London and then in Stanstead, at her family home⁴³. Towards the end of the year, she fell pregnant by Harrison, thus she decided not to avow her status for fear that he could have been involved in a lawsuit⁴⁴. Then, she moved to Brompton with her faithful nurse, Ann Madders, in order to conceal her pregnancy and during this period

⁴¹ Macdonald, David Lorne, *Monk Lewis: a Critical Biography*, Toronto and London, University of Toronto Press, 2000.

⁴² Macdonald reports Matthew Lewis and his wife's dissenting opinions. The first maintained that they "continued to live...together happily for about seven years until late in 1779 or early 1780", whilst the latter objected that "they were unhappy with each other and had talked of a Separation long before 1780" (*ibid.*, pp. 3-4).

⁴³ According to Macdonald, Raymond and Agnes's elopement in *The Monk* owes its inspiration to the flight of Lewis's mother.

⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Frances Maria Sewell was supposed to have declared to Catherine Heath, one of her relatives, "that she was with Child by Harrison the MusickMas" (Macdonald, *cit.*, p. 5).

spent in loneliness, she wrote a “valedictory Penitential Letter” to her husband in which she expresses her fear of being buried with her unfortunate child⁴⁵. This harrowing epistle will be a source of inspiration for Matthew Gregory Lewis to plan Agnes de Medina’s tragic fate in *The Monk* which is strongly modelled on his mother’s fears.

Later, Mr Lewis managed to find her hiding place and visited her on 3 July, exactly the same day in which she gave birth to a lovely girl, Fanny Lacey. After having achieved the judicial separation, Mr Lewis wished for a parliamentary divorce which was rejected outright by the House of Lords on 6 May 1783. The couple was thus compelled to stay together until Mr Lewis’s death in 1812.

2.2 THE PROFOUND INFLUENCE OF HIS MOTHER

Matthew Gregory Lewis was so troubled by his parents’ divorce that he began to write to his mother roughly a decade later. The first surviving letters focus on his worries about his mother’s health and economic situation. Actually, Frances Maria Sewell received financial assistance from her child, who provided for her with his savings and part of his father’s allowance, although she used to accuse him of having left her to her own devices. Obviously, it was Lewis’s mother who abandoned him for her new relationship with Harrison, just the opposite of her accusation. However, Lewis was so deeply attached to his mother that, before leaving for Jamaica, he did not feel like saying goodbye to her⁴⁶.

⁴⁵ “I have so much of the weak Woman about me, that I own to you the Burial has more terrors in it than the possibility of my dissolution. I cannot reconcile my Mind to the gloom conveyed to the Hearts of those who loved me, by the Melancholy scenes w^{ch} follow the Event: neither do I feel easy at the thought of being either Naild up in any thing, or put low under ground, yet I dislike ridiculous particularities on your account, but could any thing like a Tomb be erected for me, large enough for you and my Children in future (& I pray to Heaven at a very *distant* period) to lay by me. Could White be substituted for Black for us all, and Could I think that none of us either you, them, or myself, w^d be put under Ground or Naild down, my last moments w^d I own be easier; & they *will* be so, because I think you will if possible attend to my request: I w^d wish the possibility for light and Air to enter in this Tomb from the apprehension I have always had of being buried in a trance...” (*ibid.*, p. 7).

⁴⁶ On his first voyage he wrote to her: “The scene of taking leave would have been so very painful to myself, and probably to you, that I thought it infinitely better to spare each other the unnecessary agony”. Likewise, on his second voyage he wrote: “[...] When I return, if you will only allow me to visit you in the same quite

Moreover, Frances Maria was an important figure in Lewis's career. On the one hand, she supported him in his career as a writer⁴⁷, on the other hand, she significantly influenced his works. Many of Lewis's works, in fact, portray a wide range of female characters, above all mothers. Two stapling mothering figures stand out: those which are conceived of as bad examples and thus sentenced to death or remorse, called by Macdonald the "erring women" or "whores"⁴⁸ and, those which are thought to be a paragon of virtue, that is to say, the "heroic mothers" or "Madonna" who struggle until death to save their daughters' lives⁴⁹. It is worth pointing out the character of Matilda, in *The Monk*, because she is the striking exception to the rule. Indeed, she has a multi-faceted personality given that she does not belong to either of these two categories. Matilda is both the Madonna, revered and admired by Ambrosio⁵⁰, a fake prototype of the Virgin, and "the prostitute", according to the monk's words:

"Again he paced his chamber hastily; then stopping, his eyes fell upon the picture of his once-admired Madonna: he tore it with indignation from the wall; he threw it on the ground, and spurned it from him with his foot: 'The Prostitute!'" (p. 159).

However, the devil at the end of the book states that she is not the Madonna but "a subordinate but crafty spirit" (p. 289) and Matilda herself refutes Ambrosio's accusation of being a whore:

"I am no prostitute, Ambrosio; I am now no more than your friend, and will not be your mistress" (p. 249).

way, be in as good humour with me, and never trouble me on subjects which you know to be painful or agitating to me, I shall have great pleasure in cultivating your society" (*ibid.*, p. 23).

⁴⁷ According to the biographer, "Lewis's mother was not just the intended beneficiary of his writings; she was virtually a collaborator" (*ibid.*, p. 30).

⁴⁸ For instance Agnes de Medina in *The Monk* (1796), Elvira in *Rolla; or, The Peruvian Hero* (1799) and Zorayda in *The East Indian* (1799).

⁴⁹ One could mention Elvira in *The Monk* (1796) and the ghost in *The Castle Spectre* (1797).

⁵⁰ "[...] he fixed his eyes upon a picture of the Virgin which was suspended opposite to him: this for two years had been the object of his increasing wonder and adoration [...]" (Lewis, Matthew Gregory, *The Monk*, Mineola, New York, Dover Publications, Inc., 2003, p. 24. All references are from this edition and will be given in parenthesis in the text).

2.3 THE POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH HIS FATHER AND HIS PANGS OF JEALOUSY

Matthew Gregory Lewis's father was appointed chief clerk of the War Office in 1772 and three years later, he was delegated as deputy-secretary to war. Since his wage steadily increased, Matthew asked his father to give him an allowance in order to assist his mother. His father refused and in 1794 he obtained for his son a diplomatic post as attaché to the British Embassy at The Hague. Once retired, his father fell in love with Sophia Ricketts, the widow of a dear childhood Jamaican friend of his, George Poyntz Ricketts. His father's attachment to this woman aroused quarrels with his son which lasted two years, not counting another seven years of respite. This loathing for Mrs Ricketts was due to the fact that his father lavished attentions on Frederick, her son, and because Mrs Ricketts wanted Mr Lewis to break off the relationship with his divorced wife. Moreover, when Mr Lewis learned that his son had provided for his mother with part of his allowance, even though it had been granted to Matthew, their relationship worsened, becoming more and more difficult to face. Unfortunately, since Mr Lewis fell seriously ill, Matthew paid him a visit to attempt a reconciliation but he soon died on 17 May 1812⁵¹.

2.4 FATHER FIGURES

Similarly, there are in Lewis's works two kinds of father-figures, the good and loving fathers and husbands⁵² and the bad and brutal ones⁵³. His father, as well as his mother, took an interest in his son's publications, though to a lesser extent and he tried to

⁵¹ Matthew Gregory Lewis states in one letter: "[...] Nine years of constant harshness or indifference on his part have now made us Strangers to each other; But still I dread so much the thoughts of witnessing his sufferings, that I scarcely know, whether for my *own* happiness I ought to wish for a reconciliation *now* [...]" (Macdonald, *cit.*, p. 41).

⁵² Among the good fathers one could mention: Munster the harper in *The Minister* (1797) and Percy and Angela's father in *The Castle Spectre* (1797).

⁵³ Among the wicked ones one could remark: Count Rosemberg in *The Minister* (1797), Michael Ducas, Emperor of Byzantium in *Adelgitha; or, The Fruits of a Single Error* (1806).

persuade him to bring out some of his poems. As soon as his first novel, *The Monk*, appeared in 1796, Matthew wrote to his father a formal letter in which he apologized for the scandal which followed its publication⁵⁴. After his father's death, Matthew Gregory Lewis gave up the literary career to look after the Jamaican plantations, inherited from his father, an anti-abolitionist slave-owner. Unlike his father, Lewis was in favour of the campaign for the abolition of the slave trade and for this reason he tried to improve the working conditions of his slaves, by banning every kind of punishment and by restoring their well-deserved day off.

In fact, in Lewis's opinion, the relationship master-slave must be based on a mutual feudal loyalty. Some of his works, even if they do not display feudal settings, present servants faithful to the landowner⁵⁵. Furthermore, according to the writer, this tie was so familial, somehow so paternal, that he worried about what would have become of them after his death.

2.5 AN ALLEGED HOMOSEXUALITY

As regards Lewis's sexuality, his misogyny, better tackled in the novel *The Monk*, stems from a pathological way of thinking which was deeply-rooted in the society of this time. Lewis was neither married nor was there any proof of a well-founded liaison with a woman. Yet, according to Baron-Wilson, who minutely examined some letters addressed to Lady Charlotte Campbell, Lewis was particularly fond of the fifth Duke of Argyll's daughter. Conversely, the majority of critics has always omitted details about the author's sexuality

⁵⁴ "To express my sorrow for having given you pain, is my motive for now addressing you; and also to assure you that you shall not feel that pain a second time on my account. Having made you feel it at all, would be sufficient reason, had I not others, to make me regret having published the first edition of 'The Monk'; ... I perceive that I have put too much confidence in the accuracy of my own judgement ..." (Macdonald, *cit.*, p. 47).

⁵⁵ *The Monk, The Minister, The Castle Spectre, Adelmorn, Alfonso, Adelgitha, Feudal Tyrants, The Wood Daemon, Timour the Tartar* and finally *The East Indian*.

apart from Montague Summers who, basing his statement on Byron's account⁵⁶, in *The Gothic Quest*, declares that Lewis, was "homosexual, had many affairs and intrigues, but there can be no question that William Martin Kelly was the absorbing passion of his life"⁵⁷. In fact, Lewis had been the patron of William Martin Kelly from 1802 to 1815. In obedience to his mother's wishes, William was supported in education until Lewis's father ceased to give his son an allowance since he obtained a place for him in the War Office. As a consequence, William's mother began to provide for her son by taking up writing as a career. Even though Lewis disapproved of female writers⁵⁸, he read some of Mrs Kelly's works and showed them to his publisher. In her turn, she praised the *Midnight Hymn* (pp. 166-167) which appears in *The Monk*, in *A Modern Incident in Domestic Life* (1803), in order to express her deep sense of gratitude to Lewis.

Finally, the relationship between Lewis and William abruptly broke off when this latter sank deeply into debt without worrying about the man who had been his benefactor for about ten years.

According to Louis F. Peck, the first biographer of Matthew Gregory Lewis, the observations on the writer's sexuality do not rest on true facts but on four alleged assumptions on Lewis's feelings towards those men who belonged to his own social circle. Indeed, the first relationship concerns Charles William Steward, an intimate friend of his. In a poem entitled *Elegy, On the approaching Departure of a Friend* (1798), Lewis gives vent to his distress at his friend's departure for fighting in Ireland. He fears for his death during the rebellion but he proposes to conceal his sorrow.

⁵⁶ In one of his conversations collected by Thomas Medwin, Byron maintained that Lewis "was fond of the society of younger men than himself [...]" (Macdonald, *cit.*, p. 60).

⁵⁷ Summers, Montague, *The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel*, Milton Keynes, Lightning Source, 2011, p. 263.

⁵⁸ "[...] a Woman has no business to be a public character, and that in the proportion that She acquires notoriety, She loses delicacy: I always consider a female Author as a sort of half-Man" (Macdonald, *cit.*, p. 31).

Secondly, Lewis was personally attached to William Lamb, Lady Caroline Lamb's husband, with whom he spent more time at the Duke of Argyll's estate, at Inveraray, and to whom he proposed in vain dressing up as a shepherd during a theatrical performance to allude to their friendship. The practice of wearing the clothes of the opposite sex – putting on a hat covered with flowers – was strongly related to homosexuality. However, even if William refused to play the part, the relationship with Lewis, as Macdonald states, may be conceived as a “romantic engagement”⁵⁹.

Thirdly, the handsome features of Charles Grey, a Whig politician, inspired Lewis to write a ballad about Charles's beautiful eyes and voice, during his stay at Howick.

Finally, the last case of Lewis's interest in men was rather vague and equivocal. In a letter addressed to Lady Holland in 1809 he claimed to have spent the spring filled with excitement since “[...] London possess at that time a Magnet ‘of a metal so attractive’”⁶⁰. Nevertheless, Lewis had never avowed what was the name or the gender of his mysterious infatuation.

2.6 LEWIS'S EARLY LIFE UNTIL THE PEAK OF HIS LITERARY CAREER

Matthew Gregory Lewis left home for the first time when he began to attend the Marylebone Seminary run by the Rev. John Fountaine, a friend of the Lewises. Later, when he was only seven, on 19 June 1783, he went to Westminster School where he was a victim, as was common among novices, of an initiation ritual. Allegedly, it was at Westminster that Lewis was introduced to homosexuality because of the physical punishments and the unpleasant and nasty tricks inflicted on pupils. Still at Westminster, Lewis took an interest in the theatre and played a role in the recurring Town Boys' Play. On 16 April 1790 he entered the Christ Church College at Oxford where he studied Latin,

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

Greek, mathematics, logic, algebra and anatomy. Although Lewis spent a hard year at Oxford for his parent's divorce, he made many friends like Lord Holland, who later became a leader of the Whig party. Whereupon, he went abroad in order to learn modern languages and to prepare himself for the diplomatic career. On September 1791 he was in Paris where he was engrossed in many plays⁶¹ whose themes, from the live burial to the entombment, would have been a source of inspiration for *The Monk*, five years later. His mother was still dear to him to the extent that he hoped that she could perform in the farce *The Epistolary Intrigue* at Drury Lane which, unfortunately, was accepted only seven years later with Dorothy Jordan as the female lead. Meanwhile, he began to write a satirical novel entitled *The Effusions of Sensibility: or, Letters from Lady Honorina Harrowheart to Miss Sophonisba Simper*, "a Pathetic Novel in the Modern Taste, being the first literary attempt of a Young Lady of tender feelings", though never ended.

In 1792 Lewis went in Weimar, Germany, for six months to learn German. Here, he was acquainted with Goethe and Christoph Martin Wieland, of whom he translated *Erlkönig* and *Oberon*. In 1793 he almost ended a collection of original and German translated poems, he finished a comedy, *The East Indian*, begun during the time spent at Westminster and he wrote also a sort of gothic play named *Village Virtues*. Most importantly, in Weimar he began to plan *The Monk*, harking back to the shudder-novels, many works of the Sturm und Drang school such as *Faust, ein Fragment* (1790) by Goethe, *Die Entführung*, taken from *Volksmärchen der Deutschen* (1782-6) by Johann Carl August Musäus, *Der Geisterseher* (1788) by Shiller, *Der ewige Jude* (1783) by Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart and, *Die Teufelsbeschwörung*, drawn from *Sagen der Vorzeit* (1787-98) by Veit Weber. In this short period, he was worried about a possible war between England and France. On 1 February 1793, in fact, France declared war on Britain

⁶¹ Namely, *Camille ou le Souterrain* by Joseph Marsollier and *Les Victimes cloîtrées* by Jacques-Marie Boutet de Monvel (*ibid.*, p. 101).

and Holland. Before going back to Oxford safe and sound, Lewis asked his mother to get a satirical poem published, but she did not manage to. It referred to Richard Brinsley Sheridan and Charles James Fox's political speeches in the House of Commons on the partial annexation of Poland by Catherine the Great with a reference to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Lewis sent his poem first to his mother because, even if unconsciously, he thought that she and the empress were associated with the same crimes.

Once he arrived in England, in May 1793, Lewis regularly saw the British aristocracy and its country estates. Some letters addressed to his mother prove his presence in Scotland at Bothwell Castle where Lord and Lady Douglas dwelt, at Wood-Hall where he met the family of the sixth Duke of Argyll, Lady Charlotte Campbell's brother, at Dalkeith the residence of the Duke of Buccleuch and finally at Arley where Lewis spent Christmas with Lord Valentia.

In the spring of 1794, Lewis graduated and soon after he became an attaché to the British embassy at The Hague. He was anxious about France since in the summer 1794 the Armée du Nord moved forward as far as Belgium, invading Bruges, Brussels, Antwerp and Nijmegen. During this wartime, Lewis used to take comfort in reading and studying literature⁶². Actually, he finished to translate *Kabale und Liebe* by Shiller, he wrote a farce, *The Twins*, he tried to produce *The East Indian* and he read *Caleb Williams* by Godwin and Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* considering it "one of the most interesting Books that had ever been published"⁶³. Radcliffe's novel, indeed, inspired Lewis to end *The Monk*. Lewis claimed to have finished it within ten weeks⁶⁴ but, as Peck argues, Lewis

⁶² Lewis was in correspondence with his mother and he informed her that he was "horribly bit by the rage of writing" (*ibid.*, p. 109).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁶⁴ In a letter to his mother he says: "What do you think of my having written, in the space of ten weeks, a romance of between three and four hundred pages octavo? I have even written out half of it fair. It is called

could not have written it in such a limited time since he had started to write it at Oxford in 1792, then he had resumed it in Weimar and later at The Hague.

In January 1795 the Armée du Nord attacked Amsterdam and Lewis went home. At the end of the following year, on 12 March 1796, John Bell first published *The Monk*, which appeared anonymously in three volumes duodecimo, priced at nine shillings. Meanwhile Lewis kept on bringing out many other works such as *Village Virtues*, a sort of dramatic satire in dialogue which appeared on 21 June 1796. In 1797 he published *The Minister*, the translation of Shiller's *Kabale und Liebe* which he had completed four years before at Bothwell. In the same year, on 14 December, his drama, *The Castle Spectre*, was performed on the stage, at Drury Lane, with the cast of John Philip Kemble as Percy, Dorothy Jordan as Angela and Jane Powell as Evelina, the Spectre. This play was based upon some chapters which belonged to a never published manuscript, written by Lewis "in the style of the 'Castle of Otranto'"⁶⁵. This Gothic melodrama enjoyed such an enormous success for the presence of a ghost that it ran sixty times with considerable box-office takings.

In the summer of 1797, Lewis sojourned at the Duke of Argyll's estate where he wrote an epilogue for the tragedy *Barbarossa* by John Brown. He then informed Lady Holland, the wife of his old classmate, about his will to go to Scotland. There, he met Walter Scott, with whom he cemented a strong relationship based on a mutual gratitude. In fact, Lewis in the anthology of ballads which appeared in 1801 under the title *Tales of Wonder* included five translations by Scott taken from Bürger. Moreover, he requested his publisher to bring out Scott's translations of Goethe's *Goetz von Berlichingen*.

'The Monk', and I am myself so much pleased with it that, if the booksellers will not buy it, I shall publish it myself" (Summers, *cit.*, p. 210).

⁶⁵ Macdonald, *cit.*, p. 104.

In February 1799, according to his father's wish, Lewis published *The Love of Gain*, a paraphrase of the thirteenth satire of Juvenal for the Whig leader, Charles James Fox, though he did not know him very well. From this moment onwards, Lewis and Fox kept up a constant correspondence about their writing abilities until Lewis's remarks deeply offended Fox. In the same year, *Rolla; or, The Peruvian Hero: A Tragedy* came out, a translation by August von Kotzebue which Lewis hoped to see performed in that season. However, Richard Brinsley Sheridan replaced it for his translation, *Pizarro*, and as a consequence, their friendship began to weaken. Despite Sheridan's offence, on 8 April 1799 Lewis published *The Twins; or, Is It He, or His Brother?*, a pièce based upon Jean-François Régnard's *Les Ménechmes, ou Les Jumeaux* (1705) and upon Friedrich Ludwig Schröder's *Die Zwillingsbrüder* (1782). On 22 April 1799 the comedy *The East Indian* was performed at Drury Lane, with Kemble as the East Indian, Powell as Mrs Ormond, Bannister as Frank, his faithful servant and Mrs Jordan as Zorayda to whom Lewis had sent the play seven years before.

During the Easter holidays Lewis resided for a time at Brompton, at William Lamb's, in a sort of a philosophical retreat where he could take part in some "wretched" theatricals written by William Lamb's brother, George. On 13 January 1800, Lewis's brother, Barrington, who became disabled because of an injury in the backbone during his childhood, died at the age of 21. According to some letters that have survived, Lewis was particularly grieved over the loss of his brother for the unkindness he had always shown him.

At the end of 1800, *Tales of Wonder*, as mentioned before, was published enclosing nine poems and eight translations by Lewis, eight poems by Southey, five poems by Scott and thirty both new and old poems which focus on ghostly apparitions.

At the beginning of 1801, Lewis rented Hermitage Cottage at Barnes in which he had been living for eight years. In the same year, in March, he became acquainted with Thomas Moore. Later, he brought out a five acts tragedy, *Alfonso, King of Castile*, but Sheridan

chose to perform on 4 May at Drury Lane, *Adelmorn, the Outlaw*, a melodrama by Lewis which he had written before 1797. The sound track of the play was composed by Michael Kelly, whereas the actors were Jordan as Immogen, Bannister as the servant Lodowick and John Philip Kemble's youngest brother, Charles, as Adelmorn the male lead. Sheridan was displeased with the performance, but since the beginning Lewis had criticized the excessive length of the play which could have spoiled its special effects. Accordingly, their collaboration ended, thus Lewis decided to act his next performances at Covent Garden, still provoking a bitter criticism for the supernatural machinery.

In August 1801, Lewis paid a visit to the nobleman and soldier Charles Stewart, in Guildford.

At the beginning of the following year, *Alfonso, King of Castile* was performed at Covent Garden. It was well received by critics for the lack of ghostly appearances, apart from the actor George Frederick Cooke who defined it as "a sanguinary tale with so many improbabilities".

Soon after, Lewis delivered his last parliamentary speech in favour of an allowance for the imprisoned debtors so that they could have the chance of living with their own means of support. Whereupon, Lewis resigned the parliamentary seat and eventually his political career ended.

During this period, Wordsworth and Lewis had a correspondence relating to their works. The former sent to Lewis a copy of the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, the second one replied to it in appreciation of his nice gesture.

In June 1802, Lewis went in Scotland at the Duke of Athol's country home, where he was glad to meet the Duke of Orléans' brother, the Count of Beaujolois with whom he left first for Inverary and then for the Duke of Hamilton's estate. After a week spent together they parted and Lewis paid a visit to the Duke of Buccleuch at Dalkeith and soon after to Lady Charlotte Campbell at Woodburn. In August Lewis also met Isabella Kelly and her son

William. In November he went back to London and on 22 March 1803, *The Captive* was presented at Covent Garden, a monodrama based upon Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria; or, The Wrongs of Woman*. On 4 May *The Harper's Daughter* by Lewis was performed and it was well received thanks to the spectators' direct involvement with actors. Meanwhile, Lewis and The Hollands' correspondence carried on. In the summer, Lewis resided peacefully at the Duke of Argyll's, even though the war had started again.

The years 1804 and 1805 were spent in arguing with his father. In fact, the letters that Lewis sent to his mother from Scotland mentioned the dispute with him. At the end of January 1805, Lewis stayed at Bocket, while in mid-February he went back home to Barnes. During this period he published *The Bravo of Venice*, a translation of a romance drawn from the Swiss Johann Heinrich Daniel Zschokke entitled *Abällino der Grosse Bandit* (1794). Since Lewis wanted the play to be performed, he dramatized it, changing the title in *Rugantino*. The comedy, which ran for about thirty times, was thus presented on 18 October, starring Johnson as male lead, Murray as the Duke of Venice and Mrs Gibbs as Rosabella, the female lead, instead of Mrs Johnston who was ill on that occasion.

Early in the year 1806, the Whig party seized power, a fact which could have led to the possibility of abolishing slavery, which indeed happened a year later. Yet, Lewis was no longer interested in politics but merely in writing. In October 1806, *Feudal Tyrants* appeared, a novel which Lewis based on Christiane Benedicte Eugenie Naubert's *Elizabeth, Erbin von Taggenburg, oder Geschichte der Frauen von Sargans in der Schweiz* and which received mixed reviews. Firstly, it could not be considered a translation owing to its similarity with Lewis's writing. For another, the novel was by far the worst of all his works.

Moreover, Lewis published his second tragedy, *Adelgitha; or, The Fruits of a Single Error* which opened on 30 April 1807 at Drury Lane. It was a success and, like *The Castle*

Spectre, it was imbued with gothic features such as, for instance, the presence of a villain and a terrifying setting.

On 1 April *The Wood Daemon* was performed and it was, according to Macdonald, “one of Lewis’s most purely spectacular works”⁶⁶ due to the revival of the Faustian myth. In fact, in two seasons the play was acted forty times and on 1 August 1811 its title was changed in *One O’ Clock! or, The Knight and the Wood Daemon*. Once more it was a success, above all for the quality of its sound tracks by Michael Kelly and Matthew Peter King.

In the summer of 1807, Lewis went to Inveraray, at the Duke of Argyll’s till the end of November. When he returned to Barnes, he published *Romantic Tales*, a collection of translated proses and poems, in four volumes, dedicated to Lady Charlotte Maria Campbell, containing a song addressed to his sister Sophia, entitled *He Loves and He Rides Away*, later enclosed in *Twelve Ballads*.

In the following summer, Lewis travelled a lot with the Duke of Argyll; they sojourned first at Stoke Farm where Lady Charlotte Campbell lived, then at Woburn, at the sixth Duke of Bedford’s home and afterwards at Oatlands, at the Duchess of York’s estate. Lastly, Lewis left for the Egham Races where he was acquainted with the Duke of Clarence, Dorothy Jordan’s lover, who thought of Lewis as “a Man of Romance and Sentiment”⁶⁷. In October Lewis reached home and on 1 December 1808 *Venoni; or, The Novice of St. Mark’s* was performed, casting Elliston as Venoni, Harriet Siddons as Josepha and Miss Lacy as the nun. This play drew inspiration from *Les Victimes Cloîtrées* by Boutet de Monvel just as Agnes’s imprisonment in *The Monk*. Besides, Lewis revisited and modified the last act of the play. It had a run of eighteen performances until a disastrous fire obstructed its course gutting Drury Lane.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

Lewis then spent Christmas at Oatlands with Thomas Erskine, Lord Chancellor, taking the decision to cease writing.

Meanwhile the war was going on; early in December, Napoleon invaded Madrid and the commanding officer of the British forces in Spain, Sir John Moore, withdrew as soon as Corunna was reached, on 13 January 1809 precisely, but he was killed during the embarkation. Lewis was upset at Moore's loss because he had been a family friend for a long time. Thus, Lewis wrote a monody in memory of him, entitled *Monody on the Death of Sir John Moore* in order to express his sorrow, which was then acted by Mrs Powell at Drury Lane Theatre.

In April, Lewis met and saw regularly the Princess of Wales, although she had always avoided him like the plague.

On returning home to Barnes, Lewis was acquainted with William Lamb's wife, Lady Caroline Lamb and he also invited his friend Walter Scott with the aim of introducing him to his sister Maria.

On 1 May *Temper; or, the Domestic Tyrant* was performed, whose main character was a tyrannical father. This comedy was founded upon *Le Grondeur* by David-Augustin Bruys and Jean Palaprat and it was turned into a farce by Lewis but it was a failure. In June Lewis bought a flat in the Albany in Piccadilly.

In 1810 he went to Lord Grey's estate in Northumberland till October when he returned to London. Soon after, he decided to sojourn for some days at Bocket, at the Lambs' home, and then he went back to London on 9 December.

Timour the Tartar opened on 29 April 1811; it was Lewis's last successful play with a run of forty-four performances owing to the presence of real horses on the stage.

In July Lewis met in Cambridge John Cam Hob house, a friend of Byron. In September he went to Brighton and in October he left for Oatlands.

In 1812 Lewis's father died, leaving a large inheritance to his son. In this period Lewis published a miscellaneous collection of verses, *Poems*, and on 22 July he put on the stage *Rich and Poor*. Lewis's temper changed so much for his growing wealth that he demanded an aristocratic treatment even if he was a writer. In 1813, for instance, Lewis met Byron and at once they became friends, Lewis asked him the reason why in *The Tales of Wonder* (1809) he had defined him as "Apollo's sexton", thus placing him on the bottom rung of the social ladder.

In the month of December, Lewis invited Byron to the Albany where he had the opportunity of reading *The Monk* of which he stated:

"I looked ... at the worst parts of the Monk. These descriptions ought to have been written by Tiberius at Caprea – they are forced – the *philtred* ideas of a jaded voluptuary. It is to me inconceivable how they could have been composed by a man of only twenty ... They have no nature – all the sour cream of cantharides. I should have suspected Buffon of writing them on the deathbed of his detestable dotage"⁶⁸.

There was another incident in which Lewis was accused of belonging to a low social stratum. In a letter of Lady Melbourne addressed to Byron, she speaks of a meeting between Lewis and Madame de Staël at Oatlands. On that occasion, she had actually courted him but he had refused and mocked her advances. Accordingly, she revenged herself considering him as "inferior".

Lewis now began to withdraw into himself because he noticed that the aristocratic society was hostile towards him. In fact, he avowed to Lady Holland:

"I find the shackles of society grow more and more intolerable, and live more by myself than ever; consequently I see hardly anybody, and am contented to know no more than Newspapers are condescending enough to tell me"⁶⁹.

His will to retire led Lewis to plan trips abroad or to envy those who showed signs of madness, such as the loner King George. However, his ties of friendship with Walter Scott

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

and Thomas Moore lasted just as long as his passion for theatre. Some letters to Lady Holland written during this dark period prove Lewis's sincere admiration for the new actress, Eliza O' Neil⁷⁰, and his doubts about Edmund Kean's theatrical abilities⁷¹.

As soon as Lewis broke off the friendship with his protégé owing to William Kelly's deviant behaviour, on 10 November 1815 he left England for Jamaica. During this first trip, he wrote a long narrative poem, whose title, *The Isle of Devils*, refers to the Jamaican island. According to the author, in fact, Jamaica "is an isle of devils because it is an island inhabited largely by black slaves"⁷². In addition, for Macdonald, in the Catholic religion the concept of blackness is compared to that of the diabolic and the devil is a kind of slave-owner. On the contrary, in *The Monk*, the devil is black, since he is described as a "swarthy darkness" (p. 285), but he seems to be a sort of servant of the white man, not indeed a master. Actually, when Matilda is trying to persuade Ambrosio to use the black magic, she argues:

"I saw the daemon obedient to my orders: I saw him trembling at my frown; and found that, instead of selling my soul to a master, my courage had purchased for myself a slave" (p. 175).

Nonetheless, at the end of the novel Ambrosio is enslaved by the devil, he is actually damned. This conclusion seems to show the triumph of slaves over the white man and to foresee the abolition of slavery, which happened in 1833, with the Emancipation Act, later introduced in Lewis's *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, published posthumously in 1834. The poem focuses on the heroine's rape by a devil which resembles that of Antonia in *The Monk*. Yet, in the novel the violent act takes Ambrosio's point of view, whereas in the

⁷⁰ "[...] She is by far the most natural Actress, that I ever saw; [...] when Miss O' Neil appears, the only expression is that of beauty and delicacy [...]" (*ibid.*, pp. 190-191).

⁷¹ "[...] instead of being (as I was lead to expect) the most *natural* of Actors, He is the most artificial; [...] As to Macbeth, I thought it abominable [...]" (*ibid.*, pp. 191-192).

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 203-204.

poem it is seen through the eyes of the unfortunate Izra. Furthermore, according to Macdonald the poem is undoubtedly allegorical to the extent that the demon is an allegory of the black slave, who rebels against his master by raping a white woman and murdering a white man. The union between Izra and the devil betokens a racial mixture which leads to the demon's suicide showing how the slave-devil does not manage to survive without his white master. In his *Journal*, Lewis incorporated other poems which examined the sexual relationships in the slave society. *The Runaway*, for instance, tells the story of a slave who is struggling with female perfidy; or *Missy Sally* which deals with a slave tempted by Missy Sally, who seems to play Matilda's double.

At the beginning of June 1816, Lewis came back to England for a short time during which he debated with the abolitionist leader, William Wilberforce, about his slaves.

In August he went on a trip to Geneva where Byron, Polidori and the Shelleys were planning a ghost story. From this coterie, Mary Shelley created her famous *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, whose storyline emerged from a dream⁷³. Meanwhile Lewis

⁷³ "Night waned upon this talk, and even the witching hour had gone by, before we retired to rest. When I placed my head on my pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie. I saw – with shut eyes, but acute mental vision, – I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion. Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavor to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handywork, horror-stricken. He would hope that, left to itself, the slight spark of life which he had communicated would fade; that this thing, which had received such imperfect animation, would subside into dead matter; and he might sleep in the belief that the silence of the grave would quench for ever the transient existence of the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life. He sleeps; but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtains, and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes. I opened mine in terror. The idea so possessed my mind, that a thrill of fear ran through me, and I wished to exchange the ghastly image of my fancy for the realities around. I see them still; the very room, the dark *parquet*, the closed shutters, with the moonlight struggling through, and the sense I had that the glassy lake and the white high Alps were beyond. I could not so easily get rid of my hideous phantom; still it haunted me. I must try to think of something else. I recurred to my ghost story, my tiresome unlucky ghost story! O! If I could only contrive one which would frighten my reader as I myself had been frightened that night! Swift as light and as cheering was the idea that broke in upon me. 'I have founded it! What terrified me will terrify others; and I need only describe the spectre which had haunted my midnight pillow.' On the morrow I announced that I had *thought of a story*. I began that day with the words, *It was on a dreary night of November*, making only a transcript of the grim terrors of my waking dream" (Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, from *The Preface to the Last London Edition*, Boston and Cambridge, Sever, Francis, & Co, 1869, pp. 11-12).

was translating for Byron a large part of Goethe's *Faust*. Whereupon, he went to Italy, first to Florence, precisely in October, and then to Rome, in August. In January 1817 he paid a visit to his sister Maria, at Naples, where he stayed for about nine weeks. On his return journey, he sojourned in Venice till 12 August where he met Byron with whom he took pleasure in talking about literature⁷⁴. Later, he moved to Paris where he lived for two months and then he returned to London in order to plan his next voyage in Jamaica which he would have undertaken for checking his eastern estate. In fact, on 5 November he left for Jamaica, but he reached the country eighteen days late, on 24 January 1818. On 4 May 1818 he set sail for home and on the twelfth day of his return voyage he died of a yellow fever and his corpse was thrown into the sea for fear of a possible contagion.

⁷⁴ According to Macdonald, Byron and Lewis spoke about Moore's Oriental epic *Lalla Rookh* (1817), Maturin's tragedy *Manuel* (1817) and about Byron's works such as *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-1818) and *Marino Faliero, Doge of Venice*, published in 1820 (Macdonald, *cit.*, p. 195).

3. A BRIEF OUTLINE OF *THE MONK*

Some incidents and friendships in his life had helped Lewis to plan and then to write many episodes of *The Monk*. In some way, the author's novel is founded upon a variety of literary and personal influences which deeply affected his writing.

The Monk was written in 1796 and it is set in Catholic Spain, namely in Madrid. The novel is neatly divided into twelve chapters. The main story revolves around the monk Ambrosio and Antonia, whilst the rest of the book is dedicated to other Gothic subplots which are closely interwoven with the main one.

3.1 AMBROSIO'S SERMON

The novel opens with the crowded Church of the Capuchins because of the sermon pronounced on Thursdays by the renowned abbot of the monastery Ambrosio. Among the people in the congregation are the old Leonella and her niece, the sweet and gracious Antonia, who attracts at once two gentlemen, Don Lorenzo de Medina and Don Christoval the Condé d'Ossorio:

“The voice came from a female, the delicacy and elegance of whose figure inspired the youths with the most lively curiosity to view the face to which it belonged. This satisfaction was denied them. Her features were hidden by a thick veil; but struggling through the crowd had deranged it sufficiently to discover a neck which for symmetry and beauty might have vied with the Medicean Venus. It was of the most dazzling whiteness, and received additional charms from being shaded by the tresses of her long fair hair, which descended in ringlets to her waist. Her figure was rather below than above the middle size: it was light and airy as that of an Hamadryad. Her bosom was carefully veiled; her dress was white; it was fastened by a blue sash, and just permitted to peep out from under it a little foot of the most delicate proportions. A chaplet of large grains hung upon her arm, and her face was covered with a veil of thick black gauze. Such was the female to whom the youngest of the cavaliers now offered his seat, while the other thought it necessary to pay the same attention to her companion” (pp. 2-3).

They start discussing about the unstable situation in which Antonia's mother, Elvira, was going through after her father-in-law's death. Lorenzo realizes that he is an intimate friend

of his, the Marquis de las Cisternas, that has refused to continue paying Elvira's pension. Then Ambrosio suddenly appears in public ready to deliver his sermon, considered the "Man of Holiness", with his eloquence:

"[...] he seems to have fascinated the inhabitants; [...] the adoration paid him both by young and old, by man and woman, is unexampled. The grandees load him with presents; their wives refuse to have any other confessor; and he is known through all the city by the name of *The man of holiness*. [...] His knowledge is said to be the most profound, his eloquence the most persuasive. In the whole course of his life he has never been known to transgress a single rule of his order; the smallest stain is not to be discovered upon his character; and he is reported to be so strict an observer of chastity that he knows not in what consists the difference of man and woman: the common people, therefore, esteem him to be a saint. [...] Tranquillity reigned upon his smooth unwrinkled forehead; and content, expressed upon every feature, seemed to announce the man equally unacquainted with cares and crimes. He bowed himself with humility to the audience. Still there was a certain severity in his look and manner that inspired universal awe, and few could sustain the glance of his eye, at once fiery and penetrating. Such was Ambrosio, abbot of the Capuchins, and surnamed *The man of holiness*" (pp. 7-8).

His speech about human vices has a powerful impact on the innocent Antonia who remains deeply impressed:

"Oh! He far exceeds all my expectations till this moment I had no idea of the powers of eloquence. But, when he spoke, his voice inspired me with such interest, such esteem, I might almost say such affection for him, that I am myself astonished at the acuteness of my feelings" (p. 10).

Shortly after the monk's speech, Don Lorenzo and his friend go to the convent where Lorenzo's sister Agnes has been living in seclusion since she took the veil. Drawing near the porch, Lorenzo barely distinguishes a dark shape moving suspiciously towards the statue of St. Francis, placing a letter beneath it and quickly vanishing. Burning with curiosity, the two friends decide to observe the nuns' procession to the statue in order to find out which of the sisters could be involved in the clandestine love affair. Surprisingly, it is Agnes that grabs the mysterious letter. At that point, Lorenzo realizes that the furtive shadow is still waiting to see if his lover finds the message he has left. He approaches the figure but as soon as he brandishes the sword, he realizes that the man is his friend the Marquis Raymond de las Cisternas, disguised as Alphonso d'Alvarada.

The chapter ends with two different digressions. Raymond goes home with his friend Lorenzo to make clear his relationship with Agnes. On her way, Antonia encounters a gypsy who predicts how gloomy her future will be:

“Jesus! What a palm is there! Chaste and gentle, young and fair, perfect mind and form possessing, you would be some good man’s blessing; but, alas, this line discovers that destruction o’er you hovers; lustful man and crafty devil will combine to work your evil; and from earth by sorrows driven, soon your soul must speed to heaven. Yet your sufferings to delay, well remember what I say. When you one more virtuous see than belongs to man to be; one, whose self no crimes assailing, pities not his neighbour’s failing; call the gipsy’s words to mind: though he seem so good and kind, fair exteriors oft will hide hearts that swell with lust and pride. Lovely maid, with tears I leave you: let not my prediction grieve you; rather, with submission bending, calmly wait distress impending, and expect eternal bliss in a better world than this” (p. 22).

3.2 THE DOWNFALL

The second chapter shows the priest in his cell while he is praising himself for his exemplary behaviour and unshakeable faith. However, looking at a picture of the Virgin he thinks whether he would have succumbed to her charm. The increasing anxiety provoked by her beauty seems to foresee the weakness of the monk, rather than his strength of mind. Therefore, he seeks a way to convince himself that this kind of woman cannot exist among human beings.

It is exactly when the monk begins to doubt and question his faith that one of the most crucial characters is introduced: Rosario, a young novice who lives in the convent. Rosario is almost ready to take his vows and a strong and close tie suddenly strikes up between the two.

At this point of the plot, the story shifts to the convent of St. Clare where Ambrosio usually hears the nuns’ daily confessions. Accidentally, a letter falls from Agnes’ bosom and the abbot, on reading it discovers her pregnancy and the attempt to escape from the monastery, thanks to Don Raymond’s aid. Despite desperate pleas from Agnes, the monk refuses to conceal her secret and he reveals it to the prioress. Agnes remains distraught at

the monk's heartless refusal to help her and her verbal abuses seem to anticipate that Ambrosio will yield to temptation:

“Hear me! Man of an hard heart! Hear me, proud, stern, and cruel! You could have saved me; you could have restored me to happiness and virtue but would not; you are the destroyer of my soul; you are my murderer, and on you all the curse of my death and my unborn infant's! Insolent in your yet unshaken virtue, you disdained the prayers of a penitent; but God will show mercy, though you show none. And where is the merit of your boasted virtue? What temptations have you vanquished? Coward! You have fled from it, not opposed seduction. But the day of trial arrive. Oh! Then, when you yield to impetuous passions; when you feel that man is weak, and born to err; when, shuddering, you look back upon your crimes, and solicit with terror the mercy of your God, oh! – in that fearful moment, think upon me! Think upon your cruelty! Think upon Agnes – and despair of pardon!” (p. 29).

Absolutely shattered by these last words, he comes towards the abbey-garden to soothe his nagging anxiety but he meets Rosario in a moment of madness. The novice reveals that he had a sister, named Matilda, who had fallen in love with a young man who was already betrothed to another woman. Incapable of staying apart, she came to his household and she confessed she had been feeling an intense passion for him. Thus, the young man threw her out of his house and shortly after she died of grief. After Rosario's confession, Ambrosio understands that he is worried about something more painful and asks him for clearer explanations. As Ambrosio swears to allow him to finish his novitiate, Rosario discloses that the story of his sister is actually his own. Hence, he reveals he is a woman, Matilda, dressed up as a man and that she has fallen in love with the priest. On the one hand, the upset monk is fully satisfied with her lustful protestations of love but on the other hand, he decides that she cannot stay in the convent any longer. However, she asks him to give her a flower as a memento. Ambrosio approaches to a bush of roses where he is unexpectedly bitten by a snake. He is diagnosed with imminent death, but Matilda sucks the poison. Having saved his life, but threatened her physical ruin, Matilda reveals that the Virgin picture at which Ambrosio used to gaze was ordered by her from a

Venetian painter to arouse delight and adoration in his mind. Finally, the abbot breaks his religious vows gives in to pleasure and desire.

3.3 THE TRAP

In the third chapter Raymond and Lorenzo meet to clarify the clandestine matter which involves the Marquis with Agnes. Their affair goes back to Raymond's departure from Salamanca before moving to Paris and then to Strasburg. In the last stage, during an unlikely evening, his carriage crashes and he is obliged to ask for shelter at a wood-cutter's home. Shortly after, he understands that he has fallen into a trap set by the host Baptiste and his sons. Thanks to his wife Marguerite, Raymond under the title of Don Alphonso d'Alvarada, manages to escape with the lady from the banditti's hands and to flee from an impending death. From that moment on, Marguerite's eldest son, Theodore, becomes Raymond's page and they head towards the castle of Lindenberg.

3.4 THE DOOMED LOVE OF RAYMOND AND AGNES

The fourth chapter follows Don Raymond's history as he arrives at the Baron and Baroness' estate in Germany where he sees Agnes, the Baroness' niece, for the first time. Agnes was under her aunt's charge. She wishes to fulfill her mother's vow to dedicate the child to St. Clare, if only she recovers from her malady. Being Agnes contrary to her established future, the Baroness forbids her to inform her brother Lorenzo about her unhappy fate. Don Raymond, as he has fallen in love with Agnes and wants to marry her, strives to ingratiate himself in her aunt's favour. Actually, Doña Rodolpha thinks that the Marquis' attentions are directed towards her. Once this misunderstanding is cleared up, the Baroness resolves to send Agnes to the Madrilenian monastery. Consequently, Agnes and Raymond attempt to escape but their plan fails and she returns resigned to Madrid with her father to take the veil. When the Marquis discovers that his beloved is staying at

the convent of St. Clare, he disguises himself as the gardener's assistant to see Agnes. His disguise succeeds and they meet. She regrets taking her vows so hastily and she gives herself passionately to Raymond. Being pregnant, Agnes plans to flee from St. Clare before being caught in the act of epistolary correspondence by the monk.

3.5 AGNES' UNTIMELY DEATH

In chapter five after Don Raymond's adventures, Lorenzo decides to reunite himself with his sister by presenting himself at the convent in order to release Agnes from her religious duty. He tries to meet her for several days but the fake prioress, who already knows their plans, firstly confesses that the young lady is confined to her bed due to a severe illness, and then she tells of her mysterious death.

In the meanwhile, Lorenzo meets Doña Elvira, Antonia's mother because he wants to renew the courtship of her daughter. Elvira gives him her approval provided that his uncle considers the union a profitable deal.

3.6 A NEW TEMPTATION

Chapter six takes up Ambrosio and Matilda's tale after he has yielded to temptation. For a short moment he feels guilty but then he loses his control and succumbs again to his long repressed appetites. However, despite being poisoned, Matilda assures Ambrosio that she should be able to recover from her physical illness. At night, they go in St. Clare's sepulchre where she appeals to the demons through some mystic rites for safety steering clear of the wide-eyed monk. However, shortly afterwards Matilda is no longer the object of Ambrosio's desire because every other female redoubles his brutal passions. For this reason, at Antonia's heartfelt pleas for confessing her ill mother, the priest accepts without delay. For the first time, Ambrosio dissolves his vow never to leave the abbey-walls. Once

he arrives at Doña Elvira's, both mother and child treat him in a fair and kind way since they seem to be charmed by the sound of his fine and full-toned voice.

3.7 MAGIC POWERS

During one of his several encounters with Elvira, the monk seeks to kiss and touch Antonia's bosom but he is caught in the outrageous act by her mother. Since Elvira prays him not to renew his visits, he confesses to Matilda his new wish of possessing the young Antonia. Matilda decides to help him by invoking once again the ministry of the spirits in St. Clare's sepulchre. The demon allows Ambrosio to enter Elvira's house, to rape Antonia while she is asleep and not to be discovered, thanks to an enchanted myrtle.

3.8 ELVIRA'S MURDER

The eighth chapter proceeds with the search for Agnes and Ambrosio's unsuccessful attempt to rape Antonia.

In the first part, Theodore, disguised himself as a beggar, enters St. Clare's convent trying in vain to get Agnes's attention. Before leaving, Mother St. Ursula gives him a basket as a present, whispering "Agnes" in a low voice. Theodore, pleased with the possible news concealed in it, heads for his master's house relating his adventure. In one of the corners of the basket a letter addressed to the Marquis is found, where Mother St. Ursula asks Raymond to procure an order from the Cardinal Duke to seize her and the domina during the festival of St. Clare and to know with certainty Agnes' awful fate.

In the last part of the chapter, after having performed the myrtle ceremony, the rapist monk bends over Antonia to join his lips to hers but he is caught by her mother, suddenly awaked by a terrible nightmare. Elvira in a growing indignation begins to shout calling the housekeeper Flora. Finally Ambrosio smoothers her with Antonia's pillow and hastens to the abbey in a daze.

3.9 THE HAPLESS VICTIM

The ninth chapter opens with Ambrosio's confession to Matilda of the brutal murder he has just committed. However, she exhorts him not to renounce Antonia, as her mother cannot protect her any longer. Since Elvira's death is believed a natural event, both Ambrosio and Matilda keep on plotting ways to seduce Antonia. Thus, Matilda prompts him to administer a soporific draught to Antonia which sends her to sleep. According to the devilish Matilda, this is the only way to be able to dominate her. The monk's plan succeeds, Antonia appears dead in a few hours and the "corpse" is deposited in St. Clare's sepulchre.

3.10 THE MYSTERIES OF ST. CLARE'S MONASTERY

In the chapter which follows, Lorenzo, his uncle, some archers and Don Ramirez de Mello arrive at the festival of St. Clare to arrest the prioress. The procession lasts till Virginia de Villa Franca's appearance, a pensioner of the convent and a close relative of the domina. At midnight, thanks to Mother St. Ursula, Don Ramirez unmasks the prioress and other four nuns charging them with Agnes' murder. This exposure stirs up the crowd and the rioters, thirsting for revenge, barbarously kill her and destroy everything which they find in the convent:

"Wild with terror, and scarcely knowing what she said, the wretched woman shrieked for a moment's mercy: she protested that she was innocent of the death of Agnes, and could clear herself from the suspicion beyond the power of doubt. The rioters heeded nothing but the gratification of their barbarous vengeance. They refused to listen to her: they showed her every sort of insult, loaded her with mud and filth, and called her by the most opprobrious appellations. They tore her one from another, and each new tormenter was more savage than the former. They stifled with howls and execrations her shrill cries for mercy, and dragged her through the streets, spurning her, trampling her, and treating her with every species of cruelty which hate or vindictive fury could invent. At length, a flint, aimed by some well-directing hand, struck her full upon the temple. She sank upon the ground bathed in blood, and in a few minutes terminated her miserable existence. Yet, though she no longer felt their insults, the rioters still exercised their impotent rage upon her lifeless body. They beat it, trod upon it, and ill-used it, till it became no more than a mass of flesh, unsightly, shapeless, and disgusting" (p. 234).

Meanwhile, Lorenzo enters in the sepulchre to verify if other mysteries have been concealed in it. He, and other nuns to whom he promises a protection from the rioters, hear a deep groan proceeding from the statue of St. Clare. He thus resolves to approach the statue where he discovers a small knob of iron between the saint's shoulders. As he presses it a cavern appears in the darkness. As soon as he descends the stairs, he sees a half-naked and wretched female prisoner. Once freed, she is given to Virginia and, as the plot unfolds, it becomes clear that she is Lorenzo's sister Agnes. This chapter ends when the duke comes to the other nun's rescue and when Don Ramirez and Lorenzo keep on searching for other possible victims of the cruel prioress.

3.11 THE RAPE

The penultimate chapter deals with the rape of Antonia in the dungeon of St. Clare during the riot and civil commotion mentioned above, a profitable period of time in which Ambrosio can pursue his own inclinations without arousing any kind of suspicion. After this incestuous act, the abbot resolves not to free Antonia but to take her as his own prisoner for fear of being discovered. Matilda immediately approaches to warn Ambrosio that the entire sepulchre is being scoured by the inquisitors and, on Matilda's advice and panic-stricken, he stabs Antonia twice to death, and then he flees with his companion. Nevertheless, Don Ramirez and Lorenzo manage to catch the fugitives and convey them to the prisons of the Inquisition. The subplot which involves Lorenzo and Raymond happily ends: the former marries Virginia de Villa Franca whilst the latter finally marries his lovely and long desired Agnes.

3.12 AMBROSIO'S DEATH SENTENCE

In the twelfth chapter, the story of Ambrosio and Matilda comes to an end. They are both under interrogation and put torture without delay. Whilst the abbot is accused of rape and

murder, Matilda is only guilty of sorcery, as well as the monk. She confesses her crime even though Ambrosio at first persists in proclaiming his total innocence. They are condemned to perish in the *auto da fé*, but she avoids this resolution by selling herself to Satan. Before Ambrosio's definite death, Matilda tactfully suggests sacrificing his soul to the infernal spirits for life and freedom. At first he refuses, but then he yields to temptation concluding a deal with Lucifer, as his execution grows nearer:

“He (Ambrosio) opened the volume; but his agitation was so great, that he at first sought in vain for the page mentioned by Matilda. Ashamed of himself, he called all his courage to his aid. He turned to the seventh leaf: he began to read it aloud; [...] scarce had he pronounced the last word, when the effects of the charm were evident. A loud burst of thunder was heard, the prison shook to its very foundations, a blaze of lightning flashed through the cell, and in the next moment, borne upon sulphurous whirlwinds, Lucifer stood before him a second time. [...] ‘For what am I summoned hither?’ said the demon [...] ‘I am condemned to die’ he (Ambrosio) said with a faint voice. ‘Shall the reward of my services be paid me? Dare you embrace my cause? Will you be mine, body and soul? Are you prepared to renounce Him who made you, and Him who died for you? Answer but “Yes!” and Lucifer is your slave’. [...] Will you sign the parchment? ‘I must – Fate urges me – I accept your conditions’. [...] ‘What is the import of this writing?’ said he (Ambrosio). ‘It makes your soul over to me forever, and without reserve.’ ‘What am I to receive in exchange?’ ‘My protection, and release from this dungeon. Sign it, and this instant I bear you away.’ ‘Take it!’ said the God-abandoned man. ‘Now then, save me! Snatch me from hence!’” (pp. 284-285-287-288).

At liberty, the Devil confesses to the abbot the real course of events: Antonia was his sister and the poor Elvira his mother. Everything has been provoked by his infernal powers and therefore, the monk's ruin has been caused by his vanity and lust. Furthermore, the guards of the prison were coming to signify his pardon. The very conclusion of the novel tragically ends. After this shocking avowal, Lucifer throws the monk down headlong from a rock. Ambrosio violently dies and the corpse falls in the stream of a rushing torrent.

4. BORROWED ELEMENTS IN *THE MONK*

“[...] I have now made a full avowal of all the plagiarisms of which I am aware myself, but I doubt not many more may be found of which I am at present totally unconscious”

(*The Monk*, “Advertisement”, xv).

In the second edition of his novel, Matthew Gregory Lewis includes a ‘Advertisement’. There were many plagiarisms which the author was aware, but there were many which might have influenced him, above all during his stays in France and Germany. In the Advertisement to his preface Lewis wrote:

“The FIRST idea of this Romance was suggested by the story of the *Santon Barsisa*, related in *The Guardian*. – *The Bleeding Nun* is a tradition still credited in many parts of Germany; and I have been told that the ruins of the castle of *Lauenstein*, which she is supposed to haunt, may yet be seen upon the borders of *Thuringia*. *The Water-King*, from the third to the twelfth stanza, is the fragment of an original Danish Ballad: and *Belerma and Durandarte* is translated from some stanzas to be found in a collection of old Spanish poetry which contains also the popular song of *Gayferos and Melesindra*, mentioned in *Don Quixote* [...]”

(*The Monk*, “Advertisement”, xv).

Germany, France, Denmark and Spain were actually the four nations from which Lewis borrowed some cultural and traditional material in order to create his romance. Firstly, the pact with the devil derives from the English and French versions of the Persian tale *Santon Barsisa* which Lewis found in a record written by Richard Steele (1672-1729) and published in *The Guardian* 148. Secondly, the episode of the Bleeding Nun⁷⁵ discovered

⁷⁵ In chapter IV entitled the “Continuation of the History of Don Raymond”, the traditional legend of the so-called Bleeding Nun of the castle of Lindenberg is taken into consideration. According to this hundred-year-old family credence, the ghost of the lady makes her appearance every five years on the fifth of May when the clock strikes one. She goes out of her room, locked for many years, and heads downstairs. In so doing, the apparition terrifies the inhabitants of the castle, then she goes outside and finally she returns after an hour into her chamber where she stays hidden for another five years. Taking advantage of this belief in the manifestation of the spectre, Agnes decides to disguise herself as the visionary nun so she can elope with her lover Raymond escaping her jealous aunt’s clutches and the will of her parents to confine her to a monastic life. In this part of the book, the ability of the author lies in the fact that he managed to coincide the supernatural machinery with the reality of events. The appearance of Agnes on the planned night is preceded by the real ghost which appears with “a chaplet of beads hung upon her arm; her head was

during a sojourn spent in Weimar in 1792, during which he met Goethe and Wieland. While in Weimar, Lewis read the Fragment of Goethe's *Faust*, which was one of the major sources of inspiration of the novel together with Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*.

4.1 THE FAUSTIAN MYTH

Lewis, as a playwright, was interested in tragedy. However, his love for the theatre transpires in *The Monk*, both for some themes drawn from the Faustian myth, and for the way in which the action is presented.

According to Charles Dédéyan, from the very beginning Antonia's chastity is contrasted to her voluptuous beauty⁷⁶. While the young virgin is waiting in the Capuchin Church for the powerful sermon of the monk Ambrosio, two cavaliers come close to her noticing "a neck which for symmetry and beauty might have vied with the Medicean Venus" (p. 2). Her "dazzling whiteness" (p. 2), her "regularity of features" (p. 4) and her "sweetness and sensibility of countenance" (p. 4) catch the attention of Lorenzo and Don Christoval whose impertinence embarrasses the young lady so much, that she hesitates a long time before removing her veil. It is worth stressing that she echoes the character of Marguerite of Goethe's *Faust*. They are both attractive women who react in the same manner to men's advances. They both lower their eyes in order to avoid Lorenzo and Faust's gaze. Moreover, both Antonia and Marguerite seem to have the same age. The first "appeared to

enveloped in a long white veil; her nun's dress was stained with blood; and she had taken care to provide herself with a lamp and dagger" (p. 101). Absolutely convinced of Agnes's presence, Raymond moves away with a carriage that begins a crazy race without destination or driver. Only after the carriage's crash, Raymond realizes that Agnes is not close to him. Since during their appointment he addresses the ghost saying "Agnes! thou art mine!" (p. 101), the lady spectre for many nights obsesses and frightens Raymond's dreams, until he decides to apply for an exorcist, *The Wandering Jew*, in order to get rid of the nagging nun.

⁷⁶ Dédéyan, Charles, *Le Thème de Faust dans la littérature européenne*, Paris, Lettres Modernes, 1955.

be scarcely fifteen” (p. 4) and the second is fourteen years old⁷⁷ as Faust objects to Mephistopheles.

On the contrary, Leonella, Antonia’s aunt, is very similar to Marguerite’s friend, Marthe, because they both are over-confident and seem to know how to face every kind of life’s troubles. It is Leonella who delivers the speech with the two gentlemen and speaks instead of Antonia since this latter expresses herself through monosyllables. She apologizes for her niece’s behaviour because she is “a young creature who is totally ignorant of the world” (p. 4). Similarly, Marthe shows her maturity by advising Marguerite to conceal her jewels from her mother⁷⁸. She also shows her determination in wanting to receive a written paper in which the death of her husband can be officially confirmed⁷⁹.

As to the titular, Ambrosio symbolically represents the anticlerical point of view of the author, pointing out how the monastic life can encourage vices such as self-esteem, vanity and ambition. A life totally in seclusion, in such a correct manner has always led him “to know not in what consists the difference of man and woman” (p. 8). Nevertheless, when Ambrosio encounters Antonia, he reacts in a way that is anything but innocent. While she feels “inspired with such interest, such esteem, I might almost say such affection for him, that I am myself astonished at the acuteness of my feelings” (p. 10). Ambrosio desires to possess her for her “tenderness, admiration, and respect” (p. 159), as well as his sexual insatiability. The monk has the same reaction as Faust when he meets Marguerite. He asks Matilda to conquer Antonia’s heart just as Faust demands Mephistopheles to take control of the young lady. Both Ambrosio and Faust are not able to seduce the two poor women with their own resources, thus they have to ask for help from the devil, the former

⁷⁷ “Yet she’s fourteen if she’s an hour” (Goethe, *Goethe’s Faust Parts I & II, An Abridged Version*, “In the street”, London, Faber and Faber, 1951, p. 74).

⁷⁸ “Just you visit me often here and put on the jewels secretly! [...] your mother most likely won’t see; if she does one can think up something or other” (*ibid.*, “Martha’s house”, p. 85).

⁷⁹ “I’d like to have the evidence filed where, how and when my treasure died and was buried” (*ibid.*, “Martha’s house”, p. 90).

through Matilda and the latter through Mephistopheles. When the friar visits Antonia for the first time, he discovers her reading an expurgated Bible where “all improper passages either altered or omitted” (p. 170) by the hand of her mother in order to avoid that some “narratives” could “only tend to excite ideas the worst calculated for a female breast” (p. 170). Being so close to her and seized with desire, he attempts to rape her until Elvira enters the room stopping Ambrosio’s despicable intents. For this reason, he appeals to the supernatural powers, above all when Matilda uses every possible artfulness for increasing his wild desires. She, in fact, magnificently embodies the female Tempter when she shows him through a mirror the naked body of Antonia while bathing. Just as Ambrosio has a little taste of Antonia’s features which somehow is useful to intensify his lust, so Faust burns to have some of Marguerite’s underwear. For instance, he asks to clutch a silk dress which covers her breast and hold her stockings in his hand⁸⁰.

Like Elvira, Marguerite’s mother behaves as if she had an awful suspicion concerning her daughter’s offered jewels so she gives them to a priest because she needs to understand if it could be sacred or profane.

As Charles Dédéyan argues, even the two heroines share their mothers’ concerns and fears. Antonia, after having been spared from Ambrosio’s advances, feels a bad presentiment before retiring to bed. She, in fact, hugs her mother tightly as though for the last time:

“She had taken leave of her mother for the night. As she kissed her, she felt an unusual despondency infuse itself into her bosom. She felt her, and returned to her instantly, threw herself into her maternal arms, and bathed her cheek with tears. She felt uneasy at quitting her, and a secret presentiment assured her that never must they meet again” (p. 193).

There is a very similar scene in Goethe’s *Faust* when Marguerite admits to her lover that she dreads the sole presence of his friend Mephistopheles to the extent that both his

80 “Get me something of my angel’s! Get me a garter of my love’s! Get me a kerchief from her breast!” (*ibid.*, “In the Street”, p. 75).

mocking and cruel look and his hatred towards people terrify her so as to wrench her heart⁸¹.

The two scenes, that of the novel and that of the tragedy are followed by a serenade and a murder. Leaning out of the window, Antonia hears a “plaintive” and “melodious” symphony (p. 194) sung by Lorenzo, but her modesty forbids her from thinking that it is addressed to her. Conversely, in *Faust* it is Mephistopheles who sings an air to Marguerite in order to attract her to Faustus. Lewis then ends the eighth chapter with Elvira’s homicide for having discovered Ambrosio while he was trying to rape Antonia in her sleep, just as Goethe ends his part with the death of Valentin, Marguerite’s brother. During a fight, he is killed by Mephistopheles and Faustus. However, the death of Elvira is thought to be natural whereas the cause of Valentin’s demise, as an evil spirit confesses to her, lies in Marguerite’s inability to curb her first appetites so as to lose her own innocence.

From that moment on, *The Monk* confers on death the staple solution for almost every character. Primarily, although Agnes de Medina is not really dead but only thought to have passed away, she is the object of a burial which evokes in some way Marguerite’s imprisonment. Secondly, Antonia is first apparently dead, then she awakes in St. Clare’s vaults where she is raped and finally murdered by Ambrosio for fear of being discovered. Her initial unconsciousness seems to foreshadow Ambrosio’s death at the end of the book. Lastly, the novel reaches its peak with the violent death of the prioress and the monk, the one reduced to “a mass of flesh” (p. 234) by the rebellious crowd for having been “a tyrant”, “a barbarian” and a hypocrite” (p. 233), the other thrown down a rock by the devil

⁸¹ “The man who goes about with you, I hate him in my soul, right through and through. And nothing has given my heart in my whole life so keen a smart as that man’s face, so dire, so grim. My blood is troubled by his presence. All other people, I wish them well; But much as I may long to see you, he gives me a horror I cannot tell, and I think he’s a man too none can trust. God forgive me if I’m unjust. I wouldn’t live with the like of him! Whenever that man comes to the door, he looks in so sarcastically, half angrily, one can see he feels no sympathy; it is written on his face so clear there is not a soul he can hold dear. I feel so cosy in your arms, so warm and free from all restraint, and his presence ties me up inside. It makes me feel so ill, so faint, that, if he merely happens to join us, I even think I have no more love for you. Besides, when he’s there, I could never pray, and that is eating my heart away; you, Heinrich, you must feel it too” (*ibid.*, “Martha’s Garden”, pp. 114-115).

for having sinned of pride and lust. Matthew Gregory Lewis's masterpiece ends in a different way to Goethe's *Faustus*. This latter, in fact, finishes with the salvation of Faustus's soul, even though his mortal part dies. An angelical chorus carries his immortal part aloft picking it from the devil Mephistopheles who loses forever what he calls his "rare treasure"⁸². If, on the one hand *The Monk* shows some direct parallels with the German witch doctor, it is worth noting that, on the other hand, it also recalls Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. As Enrico Grandesso asserts, Ambrosio displays many peculiarities of the Faustian archetype, notably the pact with the devil, the loss of his soul, the challenge to tradition, the hot pursuit of something new, the pride due to the lust for success and achievement and the final damnation for having broken the rules set for mankind⁸³. In other words, Ambrosio and Faustus are guilty of a double betrayal, one against the divine law and the pact between God and men, the other against the rules of this law in human society. They both are vivid examples of intellectual and religious profanation to the extent that Faustus is utterly convinced to venture into magical powers rejecting every branch of knowledge which men are allowed to acquire such as medicine, logic, law and theology⁸⁴. Similarly, Ambrosio acts against the law of the Capuchin order releasing his insatiable desires instead of fighting them.

At the beginning, both Faustus and Ambrosio are described as two deserving and ambitious people⁸⁵. Consequently, early in the tragedy, the chorus has already announced

⁸² "[...] Wrestling from me a great and matchless treasure, that noble soul which gave me right of seizure they've filched by throwing rose-dust in my eyes" (*ibid.*, "Interment", p. 294).

⁸³ Grandesso, Enrico, *L'archetipo Faustiano in "The Monk" di Matthew G. Lewis*, Camposampiero (PD), Edizioni del Noce, 1989.

⁸⁴ "Valdes, sweete Valdes, and Cornelius, know that your words have won me at the last, to practice Magicke and concealed Arts. Yet not your words onely, but mine owne fantasie, that will receive no object, for my head but ruminates on Negromantique skill. Philosophy is odious and obscure, both Law and Physicke are for petty wits: Divinitie is basest of the three, unpleasent, harsh, contemptible and vilde: 'Tis magick, magick, that hath raviht me" (Marlowe, Christopher, *Il Dottor Faust*, con testo originale a fronte, Milano, Oscar Mondadori, 1983, p. 38).

⁸⁵ Faustus is "swolne with cunning of a selfe conceit" (*ibid.*, p. 32); Ambrosio "dismissed *the monks* with an air of conscious superiority, in which humility's semblance combated with the reality of pride. He was no sooner alone than he gave free loose to the indulgence of his vanity. When he remembered the enthusiasm

what will be Doctor Faustus's fate. In some way, the author compares Faustus's end with that of Icarus⁸⁶. They are prompted to exceed the limits of knowledge till their aspiration is brutally interrupted by inflicting on them death as the harshest punishment. Additionally, Faustus is fascinated by the secrets of the universe and the occult natural laws. In fact, throughout the tragedy he asks questions to Mephistopheles concerning astronomy, botanic, theology and necromancy. However, this access to knowledge is not free but limited to what Lucifer lets him to know⁸⁷.

The monk, on the contrary, has been stimulated to erotic pleasures after a snakebite. From this moment onwards, his burning desires grow deeper just as the burden of his guilt whenever he commits a greater sin. The "sole uncorrupted pillar of the church" (p. 23), as Ambrosio describes himself after his public discourse, is initially loath to accept the false Rosario's presence into the convent, but later he yields to Matilda and finally to the virgin Antonia. Thus, the friar shifts from a blasphemous sinner to a monstrous character where Antonia plays the role as a victim and not as a confederate as Matilda does.

In order to satisfy all their cravings, Faustus and Ambrosio apply to black magic. The first uses magic powers when the doctors of Wittenberg beg him to let them assist to the apparition of Helen of Troy. The latter uses the "constellated myrtle" (p. 182) to unlock Antonia's door during the night. The monk's nature, nevertheless, was suppressed to make room for chastity when he entered the ecclesiastic order for the first time. For this reason, at the end of the novel his death does not call forth a sense of solidarity as happens for Faustus. Ambrosio finds himself incapable of controlling his life and he is unconscious of what could happen to him.

which his discourse had excited, his heart swelled with rapture and his imagination presented him with splendid visions of aggrandisement. He looked round him with exultation; and pride told him loudly that he was superior to the rest of his fellow-creatures" (Lewis, *cit.*, p. 23).

⁸⁶ "His waxen wings did mount above his reach, and melting, heavens conspir'd his over-throw: for falling to a divellish exercise, and glutted now with learnings golden gifts, he surfets upon cursed Necromancie [...]" (Marlowe, *cit.*, p. 32).

⁸⁷ Grandesso, *cit.*, p. 13.

Moreover, what helps Faustus and Ambrosio to attain their objectives are two devilish characters, that is, Mephistopheles and Matilda. The former is a devoted and an ironical servant of the “great *Lucifer*”⁸⁸ who has zealously preserved Faustus’s soul for twenty-four years so as to ensure him a life of debauchery until his death. Mephistopheles’s early behaviour changes towards the end of the novel, in other words, it shifts from submissiveness⁸⁹ to mockery because of the doctor’s defeat⁹⁰, whereas the latter, using a term coined by Edward Morgan Forster, is a round character rather than a flat one⁹¹. She develops a multiple personality to the extent that she plays many roles throughout the novel. At first, Matilda enters the monastery as a novice named Rosario for the purpose of keeping concealed her true identity among the rest of the monks. Later, she reveals to him that she is a woman who has fallen in love with him aiming at yielding Ambrosio to temptation and to an eternal damnation. Actually, she leads him to violate the laws of his religious order, namely that of banning the presence of any women into the convent and then she initiates him to sex by committing the more despicable crimes. Contextually, he seems powerless in the face of the devilish Matilda who is his inspirer and the author of his misconduct. It is she who persuades him to break his vow of chastity and who induces him to an indirect relationship with Lucifer by giving him the myrtle branch. It is she again who advises Ambrosio how he could act after the fictitious death of Antonia and who spurred

⁸⁸ Marlowe, *cit.*, p. 48.

⁸⁹ “[...] Go beare these tydings to great *Lucifer*, seeing *Faustus* hath incur’d eternall death, by desperate thoughts against *Joves* Deity: say he surrenders up to him his soule, so he will spare him foure and twenty yeares, letting him live in all voluptuousnesse, having thee ever to attend on me, to give me whatsoever I shall aske; to tell me whatsoever I demand: to slay mine enemies, and aid my friends, and alwaies be obedient to my will [...]” (*ibid.*, pp. 50-52).

⁹⁰ MEPHISTOPHILIS: “I, *Faustus*, now thou hast no hope of heaven, therefore despaire, thinkeonely upon hell; for that must be thy mansion, there to dwell”.

FAUSTUS: “O thou bewitching fiend, ’twas thy temptation, hath rob’d me of eternall happinesse”.

MEPHISTOPHELIS: “I doe confesse it *Faustus*, and rejoyce; ’twas I, that when thou wer’t i’the way to heaven, damb’d up thy passage; when thou took’st the booke, to view the Scriptures, then I turn’d the leaves and led thine eye. What, weep’st thou? ’tis too late, despaire, farewell, fooles that will laugh on earth, must weepe in hell” (*ibid.*, p. 162).

⁹¹ “The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, it is flat. If it does not convince, it is flat pretending to be round. It has the incalculability of life about it - life within the pages of a book” (Forster, Edward Morgan, *Aspects of the Novel*, London, Penguin Books, 1974, p. 81).

him to possess his sister in the dark vaults of St. Clare's abbey. Eventually, once again it is she who presents herself at Ambrosio's cell assuring him a complete liberty provided that he gives his soul to the infernal demons. At the first attempt, her proposal is rejected by the monk who trusts in God's goodness:

“Matilda, your counsels are dangerous; I dare not, I will not follow them. I must not give up my claim to salvation. Monstrous are my crimes; but God is merciful, and I will not despair of pardon” (p. 283).

However, before leaving, she craftily puts a book of magic formulas down with a view to tempting him:

“[...] I leave with you this book. Read the four first lines of the seventh page backwards. The spirit, whom you have already once beheld, will immediately appear to you. If you are wise, we shall meet again; if not, farewell for ever!” (p. 283).

Obviously, Ambrosio yields to Lucifer, he signs a pact with him and he is freed from prison and led as far as the steepest precipice in Sierra Morena. Here, he will discover the true identity of Matilda, that is “a subordinate but crafty spirit” (p. 289) sent by the devil so that Ambrosio could pay his crimes dearly.

It is important to stress how Matilda reveals four different identities throughout the novel; she first appears as if she represents the religious icon of the Christian imaginary, the Madonna, then she disguises herself as a novice, afterwards she plays the role of a woman and finally she is nothing other than a dead person, a spirit that has sold his soul to Lucifer in exchange for an alleged eternal happiness. Although Ambrosio is unaware of his *demoniality*⁹², that is to say when somebody forges a close link with a demon, his damnation has been foreshadowed at the very moment in which he has sex with Matilda for the first time.

⁹² Grandesso, *cit.*, p. 23.

Contrarily, Faustus by Marlowe asks the devil to become a “spirit”⁹³ before signing the contract with him, but after the coitus with Hellen of Greece he is still a human being. Before accomplishing his aim, Faustus is warned against the alliance with Lucifer by an old man who tries to dissuade him from sinning. However, Faustus does not follow his advice and demands Mephistopheles to punish the old man, making a hard and definitive choice. Thus, Ambrosio’s fate differs from that of Faustus because he does not know what could occur in his life since there is no kind of divine being who intercedes for his salvation and redemption.

As regards the reliance on the marvellous, both the tragedy and the novel display a markedly different use of it. In *Doctor Faustus*, Faustus learns how to practice the black magic with great craftsmanship, whereas in *The Monk* Ambrosio is engineered to his disadvantage by the author himself. He, in fact, has to face what life has reserved for him being under Matilda’s wretched influences. In this connection, it is worth quoting the schematization of a six-phased sequence put forward by Enrico Grandesso in which the succession of Ambrosio’s dastardly deeds is reported⁹⁴. It is divided as follows: 1) Ambrosio is prey to a transgressive desire; 2) he wavers between temptation and refusal; 3) Ambrosio gets rather confused by the whole situation and he hesitates even if he is allured by the idea of sinning; 4) an exceptional event happens; 5) he commits a sin; 6) he feels deeply troubled by the way in which he has behaved. The scholar then dwells on three particular macrosequences, namely that of the first coitus, that of Antonia’s rape and eventually that of the pact between Ambrosio and Satan.

Primarily, Ambrosio wants to get rid of Matilda but he is in doubt whether to accept her presence or not in the monastery. She threatens suicide and she bares her breast so that

⁹³ One of the first clauses of the infernal pact claimed by Faustus recites: “[...] *that Faustus may be a spirit in forme and substance*” (Marlowe, *cit.*, p. 64).

⁹⁴ Grandesso, *cit.*, p. 26.

he sins for the first time by preserving her from escape. Consequently, he is anxious because of this first depravity. This early sequence focuses on another similar arrangement precisely when the friar is bitten by a snake. Nearer to death, he is saved by the “vampirish” Matilda who sucks his infected blood and reveals to him that she has inspired the portrait of his admired Madonna. On the one hand, he tries to convince her to leave the convent, on the other he has to compete with his passion. For this reason, Matilda shows her first manifestation of sorrow, she falls ill nearly facing an imminent death. At this point, Ambrosio cracks under Matilda’s seduction, he possesses her unleashing his wild voluptuousness and finally he is ashamed to what he has done.

Secondarily, the following macrosequence deals with the rape of Antonia and it is divided into three other scenes which mirror the same scheme previously exposed. Ambrosio is spurred by Matilda to use the magic powers because he has no possibilities of having Antonia. He initially refuses her advice even if he is attracted by her naked body which he can see through a magic mirror. Once again he cannot resist Matilda’s cunning and although extremely worried, he gratefully receives from her a magic myrtle. Then, Ambrosio goes to Antonia hesitating about the approaching crime even though he is sure that he will go unpunished. However, when he is about to rape Antonia, Elvira catches him, he kills her and frantic with fear he returns unobserved to the abbey. Eventually, he drugs Antonia and waits for unnatural death. She is buried in the underground vaults of St. Clare where the monk can rape her without being seen. After having committed this barbarous crime, Ambrosio is filled with remorse and devises a plan which can rectify the accomplished damage. The fourth sequence begins with the arrival of Matilda who warns Ambrosio about the imminent approach of Lorenzo de Medina advising him to kill Antonia with a poniard. As usual, the monk initially refuses Matilda’s proposal and tries to lock Antonia up in a cell. She manages to escape, thus the outraged monk murders Antonia after a short chase. The friar is arrested and sent to prison.

Thirdly, the last macrosequence goes through the final phase of the monk when he signs a pact with the devil. Matilda appears to him and she advises him to conclude the pact with Lucifer. He rejects the offer but he is tempted by the book left by Matilda for invoking the infernal spirits. Since he is condemned by the Inquisition to perish in the *auto da fé*, he appeals to Satan but he begins to vacillate between salvation and refusal. Ambrosio needs courage to choose for a short period of time because of his absolute terror of his approaching death. The latter sequence which concludes the novel, deals with the crucial moments of the monk's end. When the clock strikes midnight and the inquisitors knock at his cell, he calls out for Satan. Before signing with his blood, he hesitates once again. The archers are about to enter but he decides to give away his soul and lose it. He flies with the devil as far as a precipice where he stays poised, seized with anxiety, panic and anguish.

Conversely, as Enrico Grandesso stresses, Faustus's lifetime goes on a linear time regularly marked by the passage of the days and of Faustus's twenty-four years⁹⁵. Even though he is troubled by the apparitions of the good angels and of the old man, he is determined to maintain his initial plan. He, in fact, keeps on cultivating a larger and larger knowledge in order to fulfil his ambitions and gratify his desires. His damnation becomes irreversible when he chooses the "heavenly Hellen"⁹⁶ instead of his eternal salvation. From this moment onwards, Faustus would like time to dilate but the clock will establish the time once and for all. Whereas the future will never be possible since it is exposed to divine justice. This is the reason why his final monologue⁹⁷ about time concludes with a new pact vainly proposed to God.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

⁹⁶ Marlowe, *cit.*, p. 154.

⁹⁷ "Ah, *Faustus*, now hast thou but one bare houre to live, and then thou must be damn'd perpetually. Stand still you ever moving Spheares of heaven, that time may cease, and midnight never come. Faire natures eye, rise, rise againe and make perpetuall day: or let this houre be but a yeare, a month a weeke, a naturall day, that *Faustus* may repent, and save his soule. *O lente lente currite noctis equi*: the Stars move still, Time

At the conclusion of the novel, time ends; Satan reveals to Ambrosio his crimes and why he has decided to destroy him. Humanly speaking, the monk is murdered because of the matricide, the fratricide and the incest committed in his past; his annihilation can also be explained both in a spiritual and physical way to the extent that Ambrosio's present, as a representative of a religious order, is definitely nullified as well as his future since he is condemned to death and his body smashed and eaten by worms. They both pay dearly for their pride, for their erotic appetites, for the pact with the devil and for the use of black magic with the total destruction of their personalities.

Up to now, the close similarity which exists between Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* and Goethe and Marlowe's *Faustus* has been analysed. Indeed the unprecedented success of the novel depended on the author's wide knowledge of German literature, previously never testified by anybody else. It is little wonder that Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) described the book as "a romance in the German taste" and its author as "the person who first attempted to introduce something like the German taste into English fictitious dramatic and poetical composition"⁹⁸. The British readership relished the direct approach of the novel to the school of the *Sturm und Drang* of which the foremost exponent was Goethe. In fact, the demand for Germanic literary material was so strong in England that two literary events, which happened in the same year as the publication of *The Monk*, pointed out the growing interest in this field. Notably, the English translation of the ballad *Lenore* by William Taylor (1765-1836), of Norwich, written by Gottfried Augustus Bürger and the following translations made by Henry James Pye (1745-1813), Poet Laureate, by William Robert Spencer (1769-1834) and finally by John Thomas Stanley (1766-1850). Furthermore, the publication of two translations of Karl Grosse's novel

runs, the Clocke will strike, the devil will come, and *Faustus* must be damn'd. [...] Ah halfe the houre is past: 'twill all be past anone: O God, if thou wilt not have mercy on my soule, yet for Christs sake, whose bloud hath ransom'd me, impose some end to my incessant paine: let *Faustus* live in hell a thousand yeares, a hundred thousand, and at last be sav'd. No end is limited to damned soules [...]" (*ibid.*, pp. 166-168).

⁹⁸ Parreaux, André, *The Publication of The Monk: A Literary Event 1796-1798*, Paris, Didier, 1960, p. 26.

entitled *Der Genius* written by Joseph Trapp and by Peter Will. The first one appeared under the title of *The Genius: Or The Mysterious Adventures of Don Carlos de Grandez* whereas the second one was called *Horrid Mysteries. A Story* where eroticism is emphasized as in *The Monk*.

According to Parreaux, Lewis had probably read the original works drawing his inspiration for the writing of his novel since in a letter addressed to his mother he reveals that he ended his novel on 23 September 1794, thus two years before its publication. Moreover, Lewis could have read also *Die Teufelbeshwörung* by Veit Weber (1762-1835) brought out in 1795 in England, further proof of the German taste among the British readership. Besides, his sojourn in Weimar in 1792-93 led Lewis to read and learn Klinger's *Fausts Leben*.

4.2 THE REDISCOVERY OF POETRY

If Mathew Gregory skilfully handled one of the greatest tragedies ever written, he did likewise with poetry. Actually *The Monk* is interspersed with poetical verses which were fully appreciated by the literary critics of this time. Before commenting on old ballads which he was able to uncover, it is worth stressing the close-knit network of intertextuality which prefaces each chapter of the novel. The fact that Lewis deployed verses by Horace, Shakespeare, Tasso, Pope, Lee, Blair, Cowper, Prior and Thomson testifies his passionate interest in the classics and in romantic and graveyard poetry, thus a wide culture in this field.

The opening epigraph of *The Monk* is taken from Horace's epistles and it contains Lewis's declared authorship of his work from the moment in which it makes its appearance on the marketplace. He is fully aware of the many difficulties it could face. Indeed, it has to pass the judgement of critics, it could stir up scandal or even, it could fall into oblivion in some mouldy corner. This imitation of Horace recalls the epigraph from Pope's imitation of

Horace's epistle *To Augustus* which opens the fifth chapter of the novel. Pope's satire concerns a literary criticism and laments King George II's low esteem for poetry and carelessness of encouraging talented writers. However, in these six lines, he manifests his aversion towards those poets who flatter themselves on being brilliant artists. The invective alludes to the "vanity of *Theodore's* little bosom" (p. 126) in his skilfulness as a writer. At the start of the fifth chapter, in fact, Raymond and his page, Theodore, are involved in a debate on writing verses. In particular, Raymond warns his protégé of the dangers to which a writer can be exposed. Raymond, like Lewis in his preface, says that a writer is "an animal" (p. 129), whose work is subjected to many sharp "arrows" such as negligence, scandal and envy. He advises him not to waste time in writing, but he later claims that everybody has a wish of authorship. He explains that everyone has a strong desire for something which must be satisfied. He then compares Theodore's irrepressible love for poetry with his own affection for Agnes. Raymond's final reproachful words about some defects his poem entitled *Love and Age* contains have a reference to Lewis's "Advertisement" on his use of sources. He criticizes him for "having borrowed the best ideas from other poets though possibly *he is* unconscious of the theft *himself*" (p. 130).

One can already notice that each epigraph has been inserted by Lewis as a rational choice. Indeed, they echo a particular character or scene as an anticipation of what will happen in the course of the chapter.

Starting from the beginning, the first literary debt comes from Shakespeare's play *Measure for Measure*. In this verse of Act I, scene III, the character of Angelo reflects, in some way, that of Ambrosio. His lustful "appetite" for Isabella can be compared with the monk's unbridled desire first for Matilda, and then for Antonia. Likewise, *Aminta* by Torquato Tasso, Act I, in chapter two, contains an encouragement to love. It is a pastoral tale that promotes love as abandon to pleasure, intense delight, and sensuality with no more scruple of limitless and sinful conscience. Tasso's chapter-preface tells the reader that

“Lost is the time which is not past in love” as if it contains a reference to Ambrosio’s conduct after his encounter with the devilish Matilda.

Shakespeare’s influence returns in the third and fourth chapter. The first encloses a quotation from *Two Gentlemen of Verona* which anticipates Raymond’s fall in a bandit’s ambush while travelling towards the castle of Lindenberg in Strasburg. Shakespeare’s “villains” retrace those brigands who try to murder Raymond in his rest at Baptiste’s house. The second opens with those lines taken from *Macbeth* regarding the appearance of Banquo’s ghost at Macbeth’s banquet. The coldness of the spectre recalls the “bloodless cheeks and lips” (p. 104) of the Bleeding Nun’s “animated corpse” (p. 104). Moreover, Macbeth’s appeal to the vision to go away is similar to Raymond’s request to the Wandering Jew to be rid of the nun’s nocturnal persecution.

The sixth epigraph by Lee mirrors Ambrosio’s contrasting feelings after having gratified his carnal needs with Matilda. He “draws himself from Matilda’s arms” (p. 146), he “blesses” the night for the bodily satiety, and “curses” the day. The morning light, in fact, enables Ambrosio to meditate upon his awful crime, but the crafty Matilda replies saying:

“Unnatural were your vows of celibacy; man was not created for such a state: and were love a crime, God never would have made it so sweet, so irresistible! (p. 147).

At this speech, his sense of remorse effaces and his will is once again satisfied.

In chapter seven, Lewis shows his knowledge of graveyard poetry, namely *The Grave* by Robert Blair. These lines refer to Ambrosio’s first experience with black magic and contain an atmosphere which is similar to that of the infernal ceremony. Indeed, this scene has the same contrast of light and shade as Blair’s poem. One can observe a continuous stream of “black and white”, which is useful to generate a state of anxiety in the reader as if he too takes part in the satanic rite. In Blair “silence”, “dark night”, “gloom”, “misty”, “mouldy damp” and “ropy slime” are in opposition to “sun”, “beams”, “sickly taper” and

“glimm’ring”. While in Lewis, “profound obscurity”, “damp vapours”, “chillness” and “dark clouds” are in clear contrast with “light”, “lamp”, and “pale sulphurous flame”.

Chapter eight is introduced by another play by Shakespeare, that is *Cymbeline*, especially in the moment when Iachimo secretly enters into Imogen’s bedroom to collect some information which can state, though falsely, her adultery towards Posthumus. Imogen is called “fresh lily”, a flower which symbolizes innocence, virginity and purity, the same characteristics Antonia shares. This epigraph, in fact, alludes to Ambrosio’s first unsuccessful attempt to rape Antonia in her room. He seeks to “wound” her “chastity”, as the poem recites, because a woman’s virginity is never so in danger as during her sleep.

The Grave by Robert Blair returns in chapter nine in order to forestall the apparition of Elvira’s ghost. The latter, like Blair’s description of dead people, “knocks” at her daughter’s door to announce her imminent death in three days’ time.

The following lines deal with *Charity* by William Cowper, a poem which celebrates Christian values. Lewis decided to preface the chapter with Cowper’s words because they evoke a sympathizing vein in favour of the oppressed. The poet was against injustice and wrong and he considered liberty as the greatest godsend. Indeed, at this point of the novel, the unfortunate Agnes is released from the subterranean prison by her brother Lorenzo.

The last two epigraphs retrace Ambrosio’s fate and outline his final downfall. The first is *Solomon on the Vanity of the World: Pleasure* by Matthew Prior, whereas the second is *The Castle of Indolence, Canto II* by James Thomson. According to Prior, man is always betrayed by his own passions because he cannot dominate them. Likewise, Ambrosio’s frailty consists in following Matilda’s deceits even as far as her advice to dishonour Antonia. Thomson’s depiction of hell and devil recalls the “despightful fiend”, enemy of mankind, be it good or bad, which leads Ambrosio to his death and eternal damnation.

As regards ancient poetry, the first full-text ballad the novel presents is the *Gipsy's song*⁹⁹, a poem composed by seven quatrains especially with alternate rhyming which displays what the gipsy is able to discover and already evokes the exotic and the mystery which will be then disseminated throughout the book.

Secondly, the poem *The Exile*¹⁰⁰ commemorates somehow the drift of some French nobles to England and leads the reader to identify with the unfortunate Gonzalvo, Elvira's husband. In this passage of the novel, she is explaining to Lorenzo her sufferings due to her forbidden union with the Condé de las Cisternas, a wealthier man than her. At his request to marry her daughter Antonia, Elvira warns the young man against marrying the lady without her uncle's consent. She then gives him the last written lines of her husband, precisely *The Exile*, in order to show him how deep was his grief because of his forced departure. This poem, especially the first stanza, afterwards inspired Byron to write Don Juan's parting from Spain¹⁰¹.

The following poem which the reader can find is a Danish ballad named *The Water-King*¹⁰² that Theodore recites for the purposes of getting himself heard by Agnes de Medina, who was, unbeknown to him, a captive of the prioress in complicity with four nuns, namely Violante, Alix, Camilla and Mariana. This symphony, entirely rhymed AABB, testifies once again the writer's taste for German literature.

Another ballad is inserted in *The Monk*, exactly when Rosario-Matilda plays the harp in the second chapter of the novel. On this occasion, Ambrosio perceives "how dangerous was the presence of this seducing object" (p. 50). Actually, her melodious voice and her flexible figure while singing *Durandarte and Belerma*¹⁰³ inspire in him his first signs of sexual

⁹⁹ See Appendix, n° 1.

¹⁰⁰ See Appendix, n° 2.

¹⁰¹ See Appendix, n° 3.

¹⁰² See Appendix, n° 4.

¹⁰³ See Appendix, n° 5.

appetite before her presence. The poem was allegedly chosen by Matilda and her author because it deals with the ideals of knighthood, that is love and courtesy, neglecting other possible *nuances* of the concept of love such as passion, ardent desire and the wish to satisfy every kind of bodily need so as to make Ambrosio believe that nourishing an affection for somebody is not a punishable crime, even for a priest. In addition, the end of the brave and fierce Durandarte foreshadows, in some way, Ambrosio's fall, although their death is owed to different reasons, the former for the Roncesvalles fight, the latter for having been under the devil's control. Moreover, both are deprived of their vital organs, from the first the heart is removed which, however, persists in living because it is treasured by his beloved Belerma, from the second the whole body is dismantled forever and his life never more restored.

The last example of poetry enclosed in *The Monk* is a poem that better expresses a fervent belief in the marvellous and in terrible and frightening fancies. In so doing, Lewis anticipates the following episode, that is the ghostly apparition of Antonia's mother. The Spanish ballad which Antonia reads, *Alonzo the Brave, and Fair Imogine*¹⁰⁴, prepares, somehow, her agitated soul to be ready to face the sudden vision.

It tells the story of the warrior Alonzo and his beloved Imogine and their pact based on a mutual loyalty signed just before he leaves for the Palestinian war. However, a baron takes advantage of his absence and decides to marry Imogine. During the ceremony, a strange figure draws closer to her. It turns out to be the skeleton of Alonzo full of worms, coming to avenge again the virgin maiden and to lead her to death.

This poem was greatly and widely appreciated and it was even inserted in some magazines of the time¹⁰⁵. Lewis himself introduced *Alonzo the Brave, and Fair Imogine* in

¹⁰⁴ See Appendix, n° 6.

¹⁰⁵ In this regard, André Parreaux quotes: *The Morning Chronicle, The Star, The Lady's Magazine, The Gentleman's Magazine, The Scots Magazine, The Free-Mason's Magazine, The Monthly Mirror, Walker's*

his *Tales of Wonder* appeared in 1801. Furthermore, it is worth also quoting one of the better reviews of Lewis's masterpiece in regard to its poetry made by Walter Scott thirty-five years after the publication of the novel. In Scott's *Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad* one could read as follows:

“*The Monk* was so highly popular, that it seemed to create an epoch in our literature. But the public were chiefly captivated by the poetry with which Mr. Lewis had interspersed his prose narrative. It has now passed from recollection among the changes of literary taste; but many may remember, as well as I do, the effect produced by the beautiful ballad of ‘Durandarte’, which had the good fortune to be adapted to an air of great sweetness and pathos; by the ghost tale of ‘Alonzo and Imogine’; and by several other pieces of legendary poetry, which addressed themselves in all the charms of novelty and of simplicity to a public who had for a long time been unused to any regale of the kind”¹⁰⁶.

Obviously, the success of the book is thus due to this poetic abundance which richly satisfied the readership's taste. Many Advertisements of the novel, in fact, heralded how much poetry it contained. According to Scott, its high praise was based upon three elements, namely the simplicity of its language and versification to the prejudice of the artifice and pomposity of the style, the recollection of some Germanic ballads imbued with superstitious beliefs and supernatural imagery and finally, a varied versification. The remarkable success of *Alonzo the Brave, and Fair Imogine* led Lewis to write two other poems entitled *The Erl-King* and *The Erl-King daughter* which he included in his collection *Tales of Wonder*. Considering Lewis's great renown, and since Scott considered Lewis as his Mentor, he decided to adopt his style of writing in order to acquire the same reputation.

Hiberian Magazine, The Annual Register, The Spirit of the Public Journals, Poetry Original and Selected (Parreaux, *cit.*, p. 52).

¹⁰⁶ For the original text, see

<http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/works/poetry/apology/essay.html>

4.3 STAGE VERSIONS OF POEMS

The poem *Alonzo* was afterwards parodied by J. H. Worcester and Charles Few, even if the more significant burlesque ballad, had been written by the author himself who had included it both in the fourth and fifth edition of *The Monk* under the title *Giles Jollup the Grave and Brown Sally Green* and then in his *Tales of Wonder* stirring up a public scandal even among his faithful supporters as *The Monthly Mirror*. On 17 August 1796, Thomas John Dibdin (1771-1841) dramatized the poem at Sadler's Wells Theatre. It was later performed again, in the month of May.

Not only was *Alonzo* adapted for the stage, but also the awful story of Raymond and Agnes which was acted at Convent Garden by Charles Farley between March and June 1797, followed by a ballet, named *Raymond and Agnes; or, The Castle of Lindenberg*, which enjoyed a successful run and an enthusiastic audience. Indeed, the songs' words which had been composed by William Reeve (1757-1815) were first transcribed and later published. Nevertheless, the story, though similar to the original, presents some subtle variations within the plot. First of all, Agnes is saved by the robbers and the spectre of the Bleeding Nun does not look like Agnes but like her mother.

This episode also sparked Henry William Grosett's interest who wrote a tragedy based on the same story of Raymond and Agnes called *Raymond and Agnes, The Traveller benighted, or the Bleeding Nun of Lindenberg* which was performed in 1809 in Norwich.

On 29th December 1798, even the vicissitudes in which Ambrosio and Matilda had been involved were dramatized by James Boaden at Drury Lane Theatre. However, the scenario writer was not allowed to maintain the same name as the main character, so the drama appeared under the title of *Aurelio and Miranda*. Unlike Matilda, Miranda is a virtuous woman, so sincerely in love with Aurelio that they marry at the end of the story. Thus doing, the author seems to have introduced the morality that Lewis had ignored, but a displeasing morality according to the audience.

As regards the episodes concerning the supernatural machinery and the action shots, such as those of the robbers, the Bleeding Nun and the Wandering Jew, were printed several times in chap-book form early in 1798. Allegedly, Lewis was the one who authorized the circulation of these copies since one of them shows in the frontispiece his name and his acquired title of Member of Parliament. Also, many other works which took their cue from *The Monk* are the proof of its huge popularity, such as *Almagro and Claude, or Monastic Murder; Exemplified in the Dreadful Doom of an Unfortunate Nun* (1803), *Father Innocent, Abbot of the Capuchins, or, The Crimes of the Cloister* (1803) and *The Demon of Sicily* (1807).

4.4 THE BECKFORDIAN INSPIRATION

Lewis's novel is very similar to the Beckford one. It seems that he had been fascinated by the story of Caliph Vathek, which appeared around ten years earlier in England.

From a personal point of view, Beckford, in common with Lewis, came out as homosexual. In fact, he was accused of conducting a clandestine love affair with a certain William Courtenay even though he had married and had a little daughter. He was thus exiled from his homeland and moved to Switzerland with his family. His self-alienation lasted until his wife's death which happened in 1786.

Once back to England he shunned English society by leading a life as an outcast in his Fonthill castle until his decease.

These private sufferings Beckford had faced during his lifetime are echoed in his novel, *Vathek*. It mirrors his preference for a childish and private word against the adult and

public one¹⁰⁷. Whereas in the first, dreams and allusions allow individuals to live in a happy and innocent state, in the second, cruelty and evil lead them to an eternal damnation.

Vathek opens in the same way as *The Monk*. In both novels superiority, pride and sensuality are stressed from the very beginning. As for the first, the narrator informs us that Vathek's figure is "pleasing and majestic" and that "he surpassed in magnificence all his predecessors". Furthermore, he adds that being so "addicted to women and the pleasures of the table"¹⁰⁸, Vathek has built five sumptuous palaces, each one dedicated to the satisfaction of his own senses.

As regards the second novel, Lewis writes that the monk has "an air of conscious superiority" after his speech and that "pride told him loudly that he was superior to the rest of his fellow-creatures" (p. 23).

Like Vathek, his subjects, too, waste their time on sexual pleasures, since they are "great admirers of women and apricots from Kirmith"¹⁰⁹.

Likewise, the Madrilenian throng is joined together by vanity and pride, rather than by devotion or veneration to the saint orator. Lewis tells us that:

"Do not encourage the idea that the crowd was assembled either from motives of piety or thirst of information. But very few were influenced by those reasons; the women came to show themselves – the men, to see the women" (p. 1).

Vathek, as well as, Ambrosio, has no limits to his will. Vathek's thirst of knowledge, possession and control leads him to build a high tower where he can decipher the mysteries of distant planets. Later in the novel, he is involved in a one-way journey towards Istakhar, "the region of wonders"¹¹⁰. His foolishness, impiety and pride incite him to defy divine laws through a Faustian-like pact with the perfidy of Giaour. He thus starts to

¹⁰⁷ In *Vathek*, for instance, the only character who avoids damnation is the angelic Gulchenrouz. He is saved by the protective Genii from Carathis' clutches and he is destined to live in an eternal childhood.

¹⁰⁸ Beckford, *cit.*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

be familiar with dark powers which finally drive him to the reign of Eblis, in “the Palace of Subterraneous Fire”. In particular, throughout his tension towards the Unknown, Vathek commits a series of bloody crimes such as the sacrifice of fifty innocent children and some of his subjects with the aim of ingratiating himself to Giaour. However, his unbridled desires are ruled by his sorceress mother, a faithful adept in black magic, who seems to be much more wicked than him. She encourages him to apply for infernal aid and forces him into an endless punishment¹¹¹. She also prepares some magic philtres by mixing “the oil of the most venomous serpents; rhinoceros’ horns; and woods of a subtle and penetrating odour, procured from the interior of the Indies, together with a thousand other horrible rarities”¹¹².

In *The Monk* too, a feminine figure leads Ambrosio to final perdition. His downfall begins with the Madonna’s portrait even if he tries to convince himself that “woman is for ever lost to me” (p. 24).

Each female character, both in Lewis and in Beckford, seems to be a portrayal of an excessive femininity. Namely, Matilda, Mother St. Agatha, Agnes, Vathek’s wife Nouronihar and his mother Carathis are distorted pictures of the maternal figure. Matilda is a temptress, the prioress is an execrable and harsh revenger, and Agnes is a weak nun who yields to carnal pleasures getting pregnant. As for Beckford, Vathek’s unfaithful wife has been destined to marry her cousin Gulchenrouz, but she then abandons him following Vathek in his search for blind curiosity, fierce pride and restless ambition by defying, thanks to Carathis, supernatural forces and human boundaries.

For all these reasons, each character of both novels will receive the right punishment at the end of the novel, except for Matilda who is an immortal devilish spirit.

¹¹¹ Before being damned, Vathek openly declares: “The principles by which Carathis perverted my youth, have been the sole cause of my perdition!” (*ibid.*, p. 115).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 31.

Lewis and Beckford's world is entirely dominated by evil and the Devil. Characters' eternal damnation, which is revolved in death in *The Monk* and in a "wander in an eternity of unabating anguish"¹¹³ in *Vathek* is, according to Botting, a "warning" against an excessive behaviour of those people who overindulge in excessive passions, free violence, fanciful imaginaries and sensual allurements¹¹⁴.

4.5 THE RADCLIFFEAN INFLUENCE

A source of great inspiration, as Lewis confessed, that urged him to rapidly conclude his work, was Ann Radcliffe and notably her novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho*¹¹⁵.

Fittingly, in 1797 the *Monthly Review* protested that Lewis's considerable use of pre-existing material "[...] may be called plagiarism", but it asserted that it had been done for the best since "it deserves some praise". The magazine then explained that "the great art of writing consists in selecting what is most stimulant from the works of our predecessors, and in uniting the gathered beauties in a new whole, more interesting than the tributary models. This is the essential process of the imagination, and excellence is no otherwise attained. All invention is but new combination. To invent well is to combine the impressive [...]".

This statement aptly summarizes Lewis's painstaking work of selection and elimination for the creation of his impressive masterpiece. If on the one hand, he clearly made use of some Radcliffean patterns, on the other, he wrote *The Monk* as a direct response to them. Firstly, according to Markham Ellis, he drew from Radcliffe's style of writing the Gothic setting, above all that which is depicted in *The Mysteries*¹¹⁶. Where Ann offers medieval

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 120

¹¹⁴ Botting, *cit.*, p. 60.

¹¹⁵ Lewis avowed openly that he had written his novel "in the space of ten week" after the perusal of Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, which was, in his opinion, "one of the most interesting Books that ever have been published".

¹¹⁶ Markman, Ellis, *The History of Gothic Fiction*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2000, p. 83.

castles, secret and unknown rooms, and wild and rocky landscapes, Lewis prefers convents and underground prisons. These places aid both writers to create a dreary or melancholic atmosphere, but in Radcliffe's novels the sublime and picturesque scenery becomes a real protagonist of the story. Indeed, it helps characters to reach the highest peak of emotional experience, be it pleasurable or painful¹¹⁷.

Secondly, Lewis adopts her sensational feeling of terror engendered by fanciful apparitions but, unlike her, he does not provide the reader with a supernatural postponed explanation. Rather he aims at foregrounding the diabolic reign of Satan in order to satirize and subvert, in some way, the moral aspect pursued by Ann Radcliffe.

However, the fact that, nearly at the end of her novels, she discloses all her apparently mysterious events with a rationalization, does not remove the power which her ghosts have over her heroines and the reader.

On the other hand, Lewis adds a further ingredient to his work, that is horrifying experiences. The novel's scenes excite sentiments of fear and anxiety but also of disgust and abhorrence. In this regard, one of the most heartbreaking episodes the book displays is the suffered deprivation of Agnes's motherhood in her cold prison:

“My infant was no more; nor could all my sighs impart to its little tender frame the breath of a moment. I rent my winding-sheet, and wrapped in it my lovely child. I placed it on my bosom, its soft arm folded round my neck, and its pale cold cheek resting upon mine. Thus did its lifeless limbs repose, while I covered it with kisses, talked to it, wept, and moaned over it without remission day or night. (...) I vowed not to part with it while I had life: its presence was my only comfort, and no persuasion could induce me

¹¹⁷ In one of *Udolpho's* accurate descriptions of Emily's surrounding views one can read: “The sun had now been set some time; heavy clouds, whose lower skirts were tinged with sulphurous crimson, lingered in the west, and threw a reddish tint upon the pine forests, which sent forth a solemn sound, as the breeze rolled over them. The hollow moan struck upon Emily's heart, and served to render more gloomy and terrific every object around her, – the mountains, shaded in twilight – the gleaming torrent, hoarsely roaring – the black forests, and the deep glen, broken into rocky recesses, high overshadowed by cypress and sycamore and winding into long obscurity”. Soon later, the atmosphere softens since “Emily already perceived a change in the climate, from that of the wild and mountainous tract she had left; and, as she continued descending, the air became perfumed by the breath of a thousand nameless flowers among the grass, called forth by the late rain. So soothingly beautiful was the scene around her (...) that she could almost have fancied herself again at La Vallée (...)” (Radcliffe, *The Mysteries*, cit., pp. 383-387-388).

to give it up. It soon became a mass of putridity, and to every eye was a loathsome and disgusting object – to every eye but a mother's" (p. 271).

Thirdly, both authors share the same interest for sexual drives. Whereas Lewis deals with eroticism and the loss of moral values, Radcliffe dislikes excessive passions and advises her readers and heroines to distrust and dominate them. In her novels, in fact, transgression is only a threat. Her female characters do not overindulge in excessive sentiments because they can control and react against menaces coming from the outside world with virtuous moderation. For this reason, her stories have a happy ending with the crowning achievement of their characters' marriage, honouring the modern values of good manners. On the contrary, Lewis's reaction against the rationalistic norms is mirrored in his heroes' complete downfall, in moral and physical terms, as Ambrosio and the Abbess's death attest.

At the outset of Radcliffe and Lewis's novels, the main characters are portrayed as examples of virtue, innocence and morality in their private lives. Yet, no sooner have they fitted into the patriarchal society, than their own ethical value is tainted and tarnished. Emily's former condition of purity is at length restored since, as Smith asserts, evil is a temporary distress due to a misinterpretation of the reality, while Ambrosio's alleged sainthood is definitely irredeemable, because the world is ruled by the devil¹¹⁸. Antonia too is a virtuous maiden unaware of what sexuality could mean, but when Ambrosio appears, she feels a flattering pleasure due to his person rather than to his loquacious speech.

The way in which Radcliffe treats sexuality is not the aim of this present study. Thus, this thesis considers only her heroines' skill of reacquiring moral virtue which has been threatened throughout their *bildung* and it compares their demure attention in sexual urges to the more erotic and risqué ones of Lewis.

¹¹⁸ Smith, Andrew, *Gothic Literature*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2007, p. 28.

5. GENERAL THEMES

5.1 *THE MONK* AS A THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE

As Giovanna Franci notes, Lewis's book does not start with an introduction or end with a postscript as usually happened in those texts which used devices such as the "discovered manuscript" or the dreamlike tale¹¹⁹. On the contrary, from the very beginning it catapults the reader in the core of the gothic story. Indeed, it opens with a surge of people, the Madrilenian throng gathers in the church of the Capuchins yearning to see the famous monk Ambrosio. At once one could perceive the anticlerical tone of the author who portrays Madrid as "a city where superstition reigns with such despotic sway" (p. 1). Nobody tells the reader who will be the main character of the story but he manages to understand that Ambrosio will perform the leading role. The reader as well as the crowd waits for the eloquent preacher to appear. Pending his arrival, Lewis informs us that the populace is not motivated by pity or devotion but by the mere frivolous act of strutting where "the women came to show themselves – the men, to see the women" (p. 1). Whereupon, he reports how difficult it is to fit in the church since "every corner was filled, every seat was occupied" (p. 1) as if everybody, including the reader, was waiting for the beginning of the performance. Even the characters of the novel are similar to the players. They interpret different roles throughout the story, for instance Theodore dresses up for entering St. Clare's convent in search of Agnes and Matilda cross-dresses as Rosario with a view to tricking the abbot.

Metaphorically speaking, as spectators let us take a seat and enjoy the vision and what *The Monk* can offer to us. According to Peter Brooks, in fact, this "aberrant masterpiece" mirrors the then-historical background which saw the triumph of reason over Sacred, the

¹¹⁹ Franci, Giovanna, *La Messa in Scena del Terrore: il Romanzo Gotico inglese (Walpole, Beckford, Lewis)*, Ravenna, Longo Editore, 1982, p. 115.

so-called secularization, and the beginning of the nineteenth century where there was a religious revival, although modified¹²⁰. For Daniel Watkins too, the novel displays “a clearer picture of this period”, that is the new romantic conception according to which human emotion and imagination prevail over reason¹²¹. Beyond depicting the late-eighteenth century history, the novel thus shows the social relationships intermingled in the English hierarchical society, such as the marked change in attitude towards religion, the patriarchal family system, the sexual appetites among men and what they embroil, namely eroticism, libertinism, homosexual and heterosexual attraction.

5.2 RELIGIOUS ISSUE IN *THE MONK*

The novel disputes the veracity of a divine presence from the moment in which Matilda advises Ambrosio to apply for magic powers if he wants to enjoy Antonia. At once, he refuses saying “No, no, Matilda, I will not ally with God’s enemy” (p. 176), but she strengthens her case until the preacher’s complete conviction:

“Are you then God’s friend at present? Have you not broken your engagements with him, renounced his service, and abandoned yourself to the impulse of your passions? Are you not planning the destruction of innocence, the ruin of a creature whom he formed in the mould of angels? If not of demons, whose aid would you invoke to forward this laudable design? Will the seraphims protect it, conduct Antonia to your arms, and sanction with their ministry your illicit pleasures? Absurd! But I am not deceived, Ambrosio! It is not virtue which makes you reject my offer; you *would* accept it, but you *dare* not. ’Tis not the crime which holds your hand, but the punishment; ’tis not respect for God which restrains you, but the terror of his vengeance! Fain would you offend him in secret, but you tremble to profess yourself his foe. Now shame on the coward soul, which wants the courage neither to be a firm friend, or an open enemy!” (p. 176).

She holds the idea to rely on her aid since Ambrosio is no more a friend of the Almighty. Moreover, seraphs cannot satisfy his lust any longer; they are thus replaced by demons. For Peter Brooks, in fact, God still exists in Matilda’s world, but He does not diffuse

¹²⁰ Brooks, Peter, “Virtue and Terror: The Monk” in *Gothic: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. by Botting Fred and Townshend Dale, London and New York, Routledge, 2004, p. 191.

¹²¹ Watkins, P. Daniel, “Social Hierarchy in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*”, *ibid.*, p. 204.

religious principles as it was thought further back¹²². On the contrary, He strikes fear into people as if His iron hand was minimized. Previously, man behaved properly and virtuously in order not to act dishonourably against God. Now, he chiefly worries about a divine retribution because of his sins just as Ambrosio does.

Throughout the book, natural/divine and supernatural/diabolical forces mingle until they cross the boundaries between reality and imagination. According to Giovanna Franci, the supernatural in Lewis's novel reflects and, in some way, personifies the forces of evil in mankind¹²³. Particularly, dream is a useful device used by the author for shifting the reader's mind from a rational dimension to an irrational one. Furthermore, it turns into a nightmare to the extent that it deals with the evil, the monster, the devil or the ghost as happens at the beginning of *The Monk*, when Lorenzo dreams Antonia kidnapped by an ugly monster that sinks into the sea with her white dress:

“[...] an unknown rushed between them: his form was gigantic; his complexion was swarthy, his eyes fierce and terrible; his mouth breathed out volumes of fire, and on his forehead was written in legible characters ‘Pride! Lust! Inhumanity!’” (p. 15).

It is thus a warning sign which foresees Ambrosio's eternal damnation and the awful fate of Antonia. The white robe violently removed by the man seems to anticipate the loss of the maiden's virginity by a wretch, soon later confirmed by a second vision which concerns her future predicted by a gipsy through a ballad:

“Though he seem so good and kind, fair exteriors of twill hide, hearts that swell with lust and pride” (p. 22).

From this moment onwards, both subplot and main plot are involved in this surreal atmosphere. The former, regarding Agnes and Raymond, witnesses the nocturnal visits from the nun, the tragic discovery of her fate and the crucial agency of the exorcist, the Wandering Jew, for wishing away Raymond's ghostly visions. Likewise, the latter,

¹²² Brooks, *cit.*, pp. 192-193.

¹²³ Franci, *cit.*, p. 127.

concerning Ambrosio and Matilda, focuses on scenes in which infernal aids are evoked such as the voyeuristic sight through the mirror, the magic myrtle and the opiate.

This excess of preternatural forces relies on the inability of man's rationality to explain and grasp these mystic concepts which are out of any human control. The supernatural machinery triggers whenever a strong sexual desire is felt. In fact, Matilda helps Ambrosio to gain pleasure from Antonia through witcheries and Raymond's visions of the Bleeding Nun are due to his will to marry Agnes against her parents' wish. Religion is so intermingled with devilish conspiracy, as is testified by the portrait of the Madonna where sacred and profane are unified in the same divinity. Actually, the depicted virgin is Matilda who turns out to be an infernal spirit which represents, in some way, the human need for the fulfilment of carnal appetites. The characters' perverse feelings are often relieved in the underground sepulchre. Here, the Abbess hides Agnes, Ambrosio rapes his sister and Matilda evokes her demons. Still here the worst aggressive instincts prevail which, once satisfied, leave only disgust and repulsion in the culprit.

If on the one hand, for Peter Brooks, Lewis's religious world is deconsecrated where supernatural powers and bodily needs prevail over the Sacred and human rationality, on the other, as Daniel P. Watkins asserts, it is closely linked to the established social class system¹²⁴.

Contrary to what can appear at a first reading, the religious issue in the novel is not at all dismantled. Watkins agrees with Brooks that Ambrosio and the Prioress are bad Catholic examples in the novel but he further underlines their punishments because of their immoral faults. Moreover, he highlights Agnes's dispensation from her vows for having tarnished the religious order and the helpful behaviour of Mother St. Ursula willing to redeem the Abbess. The commendable religion is thus the only one which is able to re-

¹²⁴ Watkins, P. Daniel, *cit.*, p. 207.

establish the social order ruled by the aristocracy. According to the author, at the outset of the book the most horrible secrets take place in the monastery because people have crossed the boundaries between the diverse social classes, such as Ambrosio, who, though he is the Abbot of the Madrilenian church, is actually an orphan and so an outcast. At the end of the novel his death symbolizes the right restoration and purification of the monastic life allegedly headed by an aristocratic power.

5.3 A POWERFUL SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Generally, the villain of Gothic novels is a high-born hero who displays the tyrannical power of the aristocratic class. Conversely, as Watkins remarks, in *The Monk*, the leading role was assumed by Ambrosio, the product of a miscegenation between a lower-class woman, Elvira, and a wealthy man, the Condé de las Cisternas, Gonzalvo. The monk's bad behaviour, the author argues further, is not the consequence of his belonging to the higher echelons of the English society, so the novel cannot be considered an objection against the aristocracy. It is rather the result of a violation of a common set of social rules. This is the reason why Ambrosio is an outcast and alienated from the others and his estrangement brings him to commit despicable crimes and to die tragically falling down a precipice. Not only does the novel end with the priest's disintegration, but also with the death of every character who has voluntarily or involuntarily defied or flouted the then-social conventions. In regard to the main plot, it is worth mentioning Elvira and Antonia's murders; concerning the second one, suffice it to cite Marguerite and Raymond's nasty experience, the former as a victim of Baptiste, the latter, though an aristocrat, as prey to several misadventures, mostly when he is disguised as lower-class citizen. Conversely, when he occupies again his true high position, his story happily ends since he marries Donna Agnes. Likewise, Don Lorenzo has to deal with different vicissitudes until his will for

a class-cross marriage with Antonia has sapped. Actually, after his wedlock with Virginia de Villa Franca, he will spend good years of mutual love, as the story finally unfolds.

The issue of remaining in one's own social class involves also the childish characters of the novel. They have to stay in the social role they have been born into. Antonia, for instance, being fifteen years old, is not allowed to fit into the external world because of her young age. Her mother forbids her to take part in public life so she can mollycoddle her daughter whenever and wherever she likes. The narrator informs us that:

“[Antonia] has been brought up in an old castle in Murcia, with no other society than her mother's” (p. 4).

Antonia, as well as Ambrosio, is too innocent to believe that someone may consider her as a sexual object. She does not know how to handle real situations and her unawareness leads her to the final downfall. At Ambrosio's advances she does not discern how to behave and react since Elvira has kept her in total ignorance of sex by removing some passages of the Bible. Her veil, too, is a form of protection of her innocence and chastity on her mother's behalf. Though her features are concealed, her voice attracts Ambrosio and Lorenzo's attention and curiosity. The former considers it “so sweet, so harmonious!” (p. 158), the latter wants to remove Antonia's veil to see her charms after having heard her melodious voice. According to Maggie Kilgour, Lorenzo's act of unveiling means that he should be the suitable husband for her since it symbolizes possession¹²⁵. However, Antonia's dreadful fate has already been disclosed, first by Lorenzo's dream and then by the strange-looking gipsy, though everybody has disregarded these correct predictions.

Another child who is involved in the novel's events is Theodore, Marguerite's son and Raymond's page. Unlike Antonia, he receives a very different upbringing which has given him the social skills to cope with the external world. He is encouraged to travel as far as Lindenberg with Raymond who teaches him how to survive and manage in dangerous

¹²⁵ Kilgour, Maggie *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, London and New York, Routledge, 1995, p. 149.

situations. The difference between them lies in the fact that Antonia is under her mother's supervision, who, in her turn, still depends on men for money, while Theodore is led by an *engagé* as Raymond throughout his *bildung*. Therefore, Lewis's world is ruled by men where women play a subordinate and passive role. Indeed, Antonia is a victim, Elvira is an obsessive mother, Leonella, Elvira's sister, is a talkative woman, the Baroness of Lindenberg is a selfish person and Agnes is a wretched nun destined to suffer. Only the character of Matilda seems to criticize the patriarchal society of Lewis. Throughout the novel she displays an aggressive behaviour towards anyone who surrounds her as if she refuses the established social order in which women are subordinate to men, showing the powerful figure of a woman who is able to redeem herself from the misogynistic society of her author. At the end, she justifies her liberation as follows:

"I am free; [...] I have sacrificed all for life and liberty [...] I pant to be at liberty. Nothing should hold me one moment longer in this abhorred abode [...]" (pp. 281-282).

Daniel P. Watkins then points out the Spanish inquisitorial system set up by Lewis for constricting human faults and preserving traditional values¹²⁶. According to Lewis, in fact, all menaces whatsoever to the social stability must be actionable since they represent an enormous challenge to the established order. Ambrosio is thus punished and his downfall portrays the full restoration of religious values and traditional strata as testifies the wedding between Don Raymond and Agnes and between Lorenzo and Virginia at the end of the novel. Without the conservative ideals of family, aristocracy, religion and legislative power, Lewis's world is, quoting a Hobbesian term, a mere "state of nature" where chaos reigns. Therefore, a cross-class hierarchy endangers the social stability, while the attachment to an ingrained tradition brings people to a peaceful and happy life.

¹²⁶ Watkins, *cit.*, p. 211.

5.4 SEXUALITY, LIBERTINISM AND EROTICISM

The issue of human sexuality in *The Monk* is closely linked to the institutionalized social order. According to Watkins, men's behaviour varies with the roles an individual occupies in social life¹²⁷. A few classes, in fact, have not to cater for bodily needs, so that one can exhibit an aggressive conduct towards other people since sexually repressed.

At the beginning of the novel, Don Lorenzo and Don Christoval are allowed to seduce Antonia and Leonella since they are aristocrats. On the contrary, Ambrosio will die for his enflamed lust, pride and selfishness. Allegedly, the monk does not act wrongly because he is a wicked person but to satisfy his natural carnal appetites. As a priest, he should have not expressed his burning desires, but he yields to them without control. Nevertheless, his frailty is almost warranted to the extent that his vocation to the priesthood is said to have been imposed against his will when he was only a child. Indeed, Lorenzo explains that "he was educated in the monastery, where he was remained ever since" (p. 7) as if the Capuchin order itself was guilty of having educated him to repress the gratification of his senses. If on the one hand, the character of Ambrosio denounces the hierarchical power which directs human sexual instincts, on the other, with her release from prison, Matilda represents the reactionary manifestation of a class-reality reversal.

By far, for Lewis it is within men's right to satisfy each kind of bodily need, regardless of the social class to which they belong, in order to avoid disgraceful situations which can express themselves in murder, rape or incest.

Ambrosio is the most representative example of the worst human feelings such as pride, lust and lewdness. After his public sermon, he goes back to his cell bragging about his rigorousness and determination in the monastic life. However, the novice's arrival causes confusion in the monk's mind, first through the Virgin's portrait, then through the revelation

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

as a woman. Matilda begins to tempt him with her body hypnotizing him and dominating him as if he was her pawn. Her captivating power leads the priest to commit an endless series of crimes, one more horrific than the other, to gratify his urges without moral restrictions. Ambrosio's debauchery reflects the growing demand for sexual and political freedom in the eighteenth century English society. Incidentally, the novel focuses on the concept of libertinism closely linked to that of sexuality which were deeply rooted in that period. Firstly, the word libertinism, which comes from Latin, meant "free", then "to express an opinion about religion" and finally it took on the modern meaning, that is "an immoral sexual relationship". Among the main advocates of this radical political philosophy, one can mention John Wilkes (1725-1797) and Charles James Fox (1749-1806) who argued in favour of sexual satisfaction just as human nature requires.

In *The Monk* the most erotic scene is that of Antonia seen in the mirror while washing herself. Her naked body and bare breast are a spectacle that galvanizes and titillates Ambrosio. Lewis's voyeuristic and licentious device refers to the pornographic and anticlerical literature where monks and nuns used to have sex in monasteries and convents. Furthermore, in terms of religion, it issued a fierce denunciation of the Catholic Church's false morality, whereas politically speaking, it betokened the revolutionary radicalism of the French Revolution. In French iconography, in fact, the revolution is usually represented by a naked-chested woman as a supreme symbol of liberty¹²⁸. Just as the woman has to be desired beyond all limits, so freedom has to be the primary goal to achieve within society.

5.5 HETEROTISM AND HOMOEROTISM

The Monk contains both heterosexual and homosexual issues.

¹²⁸ In this regard, one could mention one of the greater paintings by Eugène Delacroix entitled "La liberté guidant le peuple" (1830).

Regarding Ambrosio's attraction for women, he initially remains fascinated by the Madonna's portrait, even if he convinces himself that he is seduced by the painter's skills rather than her considerable charm. Then, the Holy Virgin soon becomes an attractive symbol of chaste womanhood and his first experience with women, namely "the [first] object of his increasing wonder and adoration" (p. 24). As Jan M. Stahl states¹²⁹, while contemplating with admiration the picture, the preacher unleashes his lustful fantasies until reaching an alleged self-sexual gratification during "a silence of some minutes" (p. 24). According to Stahl, throughout the novel Ambrosio's behaviour verges on two Freudian theories, that of a man's desire for a maternal love object, lost when he was only a child and that of the structure of the psychic apparatus composed by three parts, the *id*, the primordial instincts, the *superego*, the moral part of human personality and the *ego*, the rational part of the mind, which interact with each other cancelling each other out. His search for a maternal figure is subdivided into three stages, namely the woman's idealization, her possession and finally her annihilation. The sexual perversity of the monk relies on this unconscious yearning for the Madonna, idealizing her as a maternal love object because she embodies the spiritual and moral features of the personality he is convinced to have. In fact, the narrator tells us that:

"[...] Ambrosio's is proof against temptation" (p. 24).

Afterwards, his desire shifts towards the satisfaction of physical pleasure which ends in an aggressive way, that is matricide, incest and fratricide. In other words, Ambrosio devotes his attention first to a spiritual woman, then to an earthly one, Matilda, who shows three different gender identities. At the beginning of their relationship, the priest is idealistically attracted to her as a protective mother since she saves him from the snakebite and as the patron saint of his faith. Later, as soon as "his hand was pressed gently by Matilda's ivory

¹²⁹ Stahl, Jan M, *Motivation and Perversion in Matthew Lewis' "The Monk"*, Gothic Studies, 1.2, Zittaw Press, 2011, p. 1, <http://www.zittaw.com/starticle2stahl.pdf>.

fingers” (p. 39) and “his eye dwelt with insatiable avidity upon the beauteous orb” (p. 41) Ambrosio’s carnal appetite increases. Actually, he is sexually excited by the sight of her breast due to an unconscious fondness for his mother:

“[...] a raging fire shot through every limb: the blood boiled in his veins, and thousand wild wishes bewildered his imagination” (p. 41).

Moreover, both Matilda and the Madonna are two overlapping identities in life and in dreams alike. The former is the saint muse of the painting and also she replaces the Virgin in the monk’s dreams:

“Matilda stood before him in his dreams, and his eyes again dwelt upon her naked breast; [...] Sometimes his dreams presented the image of his favourite Madonna [...]. Such were the scenes on which his thoughts were employed while sleeping” (p. 42).

Once Matilda has lost her virginity, Ambrosio’s lascivious lust focuses on Antonia. He rejects Matilda with disgust since she is no more an eternal symbol of morality. On the contrary his sister becomes the new love object, first admired and then desired. His *super ego* is overwhelmed by his wish to possess her. Firstly, he tries to rape Antonia at her house but her mother manages to protect her. Thus, Ambrosio appeals for magic powers to enter her bedroom but once again he is discovered by Elvira and intoxicated with desire, he brutally smothers her with a cushion:

“[...] with one hand he grasped Elvira’s throat so as to prevent her continuing her clamour, and with the other dashing her violently upon the ground, he dragged her towards the bed. [...] The monk continued to kneel upon her breast, witnessed without mercy the convulsive trembling of her limbs beneath him, and sustained with inhuman firmness the spectacle of her agonies, when soul and body were on the point of separating” (p. 199).

For Stahl, this death scene is pregnant with eroticism to the extent that Ambrosio’s act of violence upon Elvira’s chest and her ensuing straggling legs as if she has achieved an orgasm, evoke a rape towards the maternal figure¹³⁰. In spite of this dramatic event, Ambrosio’s perversity is so irresistible that he finally enjoys Antonia in the vaults of St.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Clare. Being the last maternal love object of his mind, Ambrosio “accomplishes his crime and the dishonour of Antonia” (p. 252) since “his lust was become madness” (p. 249). After the possession, Ambrosio repudiates the young lady for having lost her pureness and in a rage of despair he decides to keep her confined to the dark dungeon:

“Wretched girl! [...] And whom I to thank for this? What seduced me into crimes, whose bare remembrance makes me shudder? Fatal witch! – was it not thy beauty? Have you not plunged my soul in shame? Have you not made me a perjured hypocrite, a ravisher, an assassin! [...] ’tis you who will cause my eternal anguish! – you, wretched girl! You! You!” (p. 253).

However, she manages to free herself but her ravisher stabs her to death as if he had raped her again. At this point of the story, Ambrosio’s Oedipus complex concludes, his maternal love objects have been recovered though he has destroyed them with violence and aggressiveness because of his unconscious and obsessive attachment to people of the opposite sex.

Concerning the male-male love, the character of Rosario-Matilda embodies the concept of homosexuality. At the beginning of the novel, Matilda disguises herself as a man with female features:

“[...] his profound melancholy, [...] he seemed fearful of being recognized; [...] he answered their civilities with sweetness but reserve; [...] the novice received the lessons with docility” (p. 25).

Once she discloses her true identity, she acquires such a manliness that Ambrosio’s overflow of sexual emotion rapidly decreases:

“Left to himself, he could not reflect without surprise on the sudden change in Matilda’s character and sentiments. But a few days had passed since she had appeared the mildest and softest of her sex, devoted to his will, and looking up to him as a superior being. Now she assumed a sort of courage and manliness in her manners and discourge, but ill-calculated to please him [...] He regretted Rosario, the fond, the gentle and submissive; he grieved that Matilda preferred the virtues of his sex to those of her own” (pp. 151-152).

Whereas the monk is first depicted in his masculinity:

“He was a man of noble port and commanding presence. His stature was lofty, and his features uncommonly handsome. His nose was aquiline, his

eyes large, black and sparkling, and his dark brows almost joined together. His complexion was of a deep but clear brown; [...] Still there was a certain severity in his look and manner that inspired universal awe, and few could sustain the glance of his eye, at once fiery and penetrating. [...] The sound of his voice seemed to penetrate into her very soul” (p. 8).

Later, he seems to change his physical appearance by assuming female connotations:

“That mind, which I esteemed so great and valiant, proves to be feeble, puerile, and grovelling – a slave to vulgar errors, and weaker than a woman’s” (p. 176).

According to the culture of the time, both being under the influence of a storm of passions and sodomy, were conceived of as sexual intercourse which led to effeminacy¹³¹. Ambrosio, in fact, yields to temptation, first by adoring the picture of the Virgin which mirrors Matilda’s features and, as God’s mother, it seems to foretell an incestuous relationship. Later, the monk takes such a great delight in Rosario’s presence that “he loved him with all the affection of a father” (p. 25). Actually, the narrator informs us that “Ambrosio on his side did not feel less attracted towards the youth” (p. 25) and that “from the moment in which *he* first beheld *him* he perceived sensations in *his* bosom till then unknown to him” (p. 36). Thus, at the beginning their friendship reflects the same wish of the author to surround himself with men, considering Lewis’s alleged homosexuality. Afterwards, this concept of homosocial love develops into homosexuality when Matilda assumes masculine features. Even though Ambrosio’s attraction for Matilda suddenly stops, she continues to adopt an attitude of dominion, control, superiority, and firmness which is usually peculiar to the male gender. From the moment in which the monk devotes his attentions to Antonia Dalfa, Matilda uses the more Machiavellian machinations to treacherously and cleverly regain Ambrosio’s affection as a friend/confederate. Her sole aim is thus to destroy Antonia’s honour and life and to lead the priest to eternal damnation.

¹³¹ In the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century “Sodomy” was the current term, considering that the word “homosexual” had been inserted in the *Oxford English Dictionary* since 1912 (Macdonald, *cit.*, p. 64).

After his first unsuccessful attempt to enjoy Antonia, Matilda persuades him to accept her aid by employing the devil's agency. He refuses, but she appeals to the enchanted mirror showing him the naked body of the young lady. Seized with frenzy, he agrees and the poor Antonia will become from now a persecuted maiden under Matilda's clutches. First, she grants Ambrosio a magic myrtle to open unobserved Antonia's door and to accomplish the rape. This attempt fails, so she encourages him again not to abandon his designs by "praising and enumerating Antonia's charms" in order to "rekindle *his* desires" (p. 260). In addition, she plans the fictitious death of Antonia, caused by the administration of a herb extract draught, and her burial in the vaults of St. Clare, so that he can endlessly abuse her. This time Matilda's conspiracy succeeds and the monk carries out his crime. At length, in a "majestic air" (p. 256), the scheming woman, after having tarnished Antonia's soul, convinces Ambrosio to murder her. Once again the subservient monk follows her advice, so he is discovered and brought to the Inquisition's prisons.

Matilda's roughness of actions incarnates an unwomanly approach in a heterosexual relationship containing homosexual undertones. Ambrosio submits to her decisional power of possessing what she most desires. Her avidity and self-command manifest themselves in her appeal for infernal aids, during which she is involved in satanic black masses where human fingers and blood are sacrificed to demons. Moreover, her thirst of carnal appetites centred on Antonia is thus a deviation from the norm since she represents an excessive femininity of her lust even if it is transferred to Ambrosio's character.

Yet, at the end of the book she shifts identity again, from a feminine to an immaterial and indefinite one as Satan reveals to Ambrosio she is his agent. According to the common iconography, however, demons were male and not female spirits.

As regards the subplot, being involved in a forbidden heterosexual relationship, Agnes de Medina is a victim of the nuns' persecution, particularly the abbess, Mother St. Agatha.

The latter, according to Macdonald, has unconsciously fallen in love with Ambrosio¹³² since she punishes Agnes with such cruelty. In fact, she wants to preserve her religious order's reputation in Ambrosio's eyes. It is obviously a heterosexual love which, however, carries strong homosexual connotations since the prioress has masculine qualities:

“While she perused the letter, the domina's countenance grew inflamed with passion. What! Such a crime committed in her convent, and made known to Ambrosio, to the idol of Madrid, to the man whom she was most anxious to impress with the opinion of the strictness and regularity of her house! Words were inadequate to express her fury: she was silent, and darted upon the prostrate nun looks of menace and malignity”; “I tremble for your sister, I have heard many traits of the domina of St. Clare's character, for a friend who was educated in the same convent with her: she reported her to be haughty, inflexible, superstitious, and revengeful. [...] she is implacable when once incensed, and has too much intrepidity to shrink at taking the most rigorous measures for punishing the offender. [...] I shudder to think that Donna Agnes is in the hands of this dangerous woman”; “Mine is the task to rend the veil from hypocrisy, and show misguided parents to what dangers the woman is exposed, who falls under the sway of a monastic tyrant” (pp. 29-143-230).

Her male-like strictness of figure finally reverberates in her designs upon Agnes's life. First, she administers a strong opiate to her, then she holds her burial and finally she confines her in a dark dungeon surrounded by the former nuns' corpses. Later, the abbess moves her to a nearby cold and damp cell infested with pestilential vapours and loathsome reptiles. Here, the prioress ordains that Agnes should receive a harsh treatment comparable to her foul crimes by passing the rest of her days chained in a bed of straw, dying of hunger and cold and hidden from every chink of light:

“Listen then to the sentence of St. Clare. – Beneath these vaults there exist prisons, intended to receive such criminals as yourself: artfully is their entrance concealed, and she who enters them must resign all hopes of liberty. Thither must you now be conveyed. Food shall be supplied you, but not sufficient for the indulgence of appetite: you shall have just enough to keep together body and soul, and its quality shall be the simplest and coarsest. Weep, daughter, weep, and moisten your bread with your tears: God knows that you have ample cause for sorrow! Chained down in one of these secret dungeons, shut out from the world and light for ever, with no comfort but religion, no society but repentance; thus must you groan the remainder of your days” (p. 268).

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 79.

Considering her excessive grief, Agnes implores the unrelenting Mother St. Agatha to spare at least her sinless infant, who she is holding in her lap, but “unmoved”, with a “stately air”, she exclaims “in an absolute tone” (p. 268):

“What! Dare you plead for the produce of your shame? Shall a creature be permitted to live, conceived in guilt so monstrous? Abandoned woman, speak for him no more! Better that the wretch should perish than live: begotten in perjury, incontinence, and pollution, it cannot fail to prove a prodigy of vice. (...) Rather pray that death may seize you before you produce it; or, if it must see the light, that its eyes may immediately be closed again for ever! No aid shall be given you in your labour; bring your offspring into the world yourself, feed it yourself, nurse it yourself, bury it yourself! God grant that the latter may happen soon, lest you receive comfort from the fruit of your iniquity!” (p. 269).

Being plunged in this afflicted agony, Agnes gives birth to her baby, but soon after it unfortunately dies. At this right point of the story, the abbess reaches the highest point of maternal-figure distortion, emphasizing her lack of motherhood together with her iron discipline. Before crawling worms “which breed in the corrupted flesh of *her* infant” (p. 273), already reduced a “mass of putridity” (p. 271), the unfeeling prioress “gazed upon *it* without motion” (p. 272). Her own insensibility towards Agnes and her poor child seems to rebound on her at the moment of her capture. Indeed, the incensed crowd treats her with the same harshness she has reserved for Agnes, alluding to the physical punishment suffered by those who were homosexuals at the time of Lewis.

6. MATTHEW GREGORY LEWIS AMONG HIS CONTEMPORARIES AND THE SURREALISTS

6.1 THE ROMANTIC AGE: THE HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND

When Lewis's novel appeared for the first time anonymously, precisely on Saturday 12 March 1796, it captured the attention of the readership which was already deeply shaken by the historical and social situation they were coping with.

Actually, as Parreaux clarifies, England was going through a dark period, better known as "The Years of Strain" or "The Years of Unrest", because of the frequent crises in the economic and political field¹³³. On the one hand, the reign of King George III (1738-1820) was beginning to teeter because of his mental illness and his son was obliged to act as deputy for him until he became King George IV. In this political climate the American Revolution broke out followed by the colonist's struggle for independence from their mother country, later achieved in 1776. Moreover, the handicraft and agrarian economy supplanted by industry and machine manufacture led to drastic unemployment and the consequent starvation due to an increase in food prices. The British government began to adopt repressive measures against the industrial workers' trade union organizations, such as The Combination Act of 1799. At the same time it also feared an imminent working-class insurrection against the monarchy similar to the revolutionary mobs during the French Revolution. In addition, the Napoleonic power shook the whole country which went to war in 1793 against France until the bilateral negotiation of 1802 known as the Treaty of Amiens though it lasted only one year.

On the other hand, from a social viewpoint, the leading personality of William Wilberforce stood out in this epoch of changes. As a Tory politician, he fought until his death for the

¹³³ Parreaux, *cit.*, p. 19.

slaves' rights and for the abolition of slavery as well as for the reformation of manners in England. In this latter regard, Wilberforce wanted to enforce stricter laws relating to those capital offences such as the publication of indecent books, wantonness, drunkenness, brothels and every kind of debauchery so as to re-establish good manners and civic decency. According to him, the more one feared a severe punishment, the less one was inclined to commit crimes. Accordingly, in 1787 Wilberforce founded the Proclamation Society in order to promote virtue instead of vice. His own way of thinking was undoubtedly mastered by the development of the Methodist Movement to whom he was converted in 1785. One of the precepts of this Evangelical doctrine, in fact, is based on righteous behaviour and on an active and social engagement that man has to display towards his fellows in the society where he lives. Therefore, the Proclamation Society followed the Society for the Reformation of Manners, founded in 1691 which had already tried to improve mankind's social attitudes. The new reform, however, unlike the previous one, asserted that vices among the lower classes were the clear consequence of the many villainous deeds of the upper classes, namely the aristocracy. According to the then-current public opinion, before modifying the morals of the poorest, it would be better to alter the behaviour of the richest.

The Monk's apparition was hence accompanied by this historical framework which caused a further commotion among the eighteenth century English readership. Indeed, the scandal over the novel erupted because of the political and financial crisis the country was suffering and because it contained anything but moral themes.

6.2 JUDICIAL CRITERIA

It is not surprising that the controversy over the morality of novels peaked when the earlier Gothic novels were issued. The huge majority of magazines at this time was reluctant to approve this then-emerging trend, comparing the circulation of the Gothic genre with the

downfall of the novel itself. The harshest critic was included in *The Aberdeen Magazine* in July 1798, namely in the essay *Modern Literature*. Indeed, it contained an onslaught on the *Minerva Press* for having patronized the publication of Gothic novels. In this hostile climate, Lewis's work as well as the other Gothic romances, was analysed and judged according to some strict criteria.

The indictment rested on some *Gothic Threats*, as Cooper designates them, which could have endangered the established social order¹³⁴. These accusations were based on four solid principles, that is, if the novel could have corrupted the younger readership; if it could have subverted the traditional notion of gender roles; if it could have incited the reader in the belief of supernatural forces or else, if it could have stirred the public up to revolutionary feelings and actions.

Concerning the first criterion, novels were thought to have the purpose of moulding the minds and manners of young people without dismantling and disregarding the family authority. Novels, particularly the Gothic ones, were accused of fomenting domestic rebellion. After their perusal, in fact, children are supposed to defy their parents' wishes in order to obtain greater freedom and autonomy. In addition, the plot of the novel would be so influential in persuading them to identify parents as villains rather than benefactors.

The second threat deals with patriarchal control. In the eighteenth century British society, the distinction between sex and gender was in force and women were bent to the men's will. Conversely, the Gothic novel redeemed the subservient role of ladies, encouraging their emancipation. Thus, women began to play the role of active characters within the narrative, whereas men became completely under the women's thumb. Obviously, there was a reversal of gender roles where the woman assumed masculine appearance with

¹³⁴ Cooper, L. Andrew, *Gothic Threats: the Role of Danger in the Critical Evaluation of "The Monk" and "The Mysteries of Udolpho"*, Gothic Studies 8.2, Manchester University Press, November 2006.

rugged features, while the man appeared more feminine. Accordingly, this implied the development of a deceitful kind of person/character who feels sexual-mixed desires.

The third reason of charge was a strong liking for supernatural powers to the detriment of the foundations of the faith. A supernatural belief was not in accordance with two tenets of the eighteenth century common thought, namely reason and religion. Therefore, the Gothic novel was attacked for depicting an irrational explanation of marvellous and mysterious events. In so doing, the reader would be led to support superstitious beliefs and to doubt the authenticity and veracity of the Holy Scriptures and the Christian religion.

In his attempt to analyse the pivotal blames for the Gothic genre, Cooper adds another important menace for the English society, that is the fear that a Gothic novel could spread a discontent similar to the French Revolution. Sometimes, the Gothic writers were named, by a derogatory remark, the “new Jacobites” because of their aim at subverting the social and political established order such as Christianity, monarchy and morality.

This examination of the indictments under common law concerning the eighteenth century prose writing helps us to notice how Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* completely answers the above-listed threats. The novel, in fact, was the object of conflicting interpretations. For some, it mirrored the brilliance of the author, for others, it highlighted his challenging attitude towards tradition.

6.3 AN UNSTANDARDIZED NOVEL

Generally speaking, the imputations to Lewis and his work are summarized in the lines which follow:

“All the faults and immoralities ascribed to novels will be found realized in the *Monk*: murders, incest, and all the horrid and aggravated crimes which it is possible to conceive, appear in every chapter, and are dwelt on with

seeming complacency, without any apparent intention of advantage to the reader from such a recital”¹³⁵.

As Maggie Kilgour remarks, the publication of *The Monk* was seen as a literary revolution¹³⁶. What stirred up the scandal over the novel was not the first anonymous edition which was published by Joseph Bell but the second one. This latter was issued on 14 September 1796 with a change in the title-page, that is the revelation of the author’s full name and position of “M.P.” to reflect his recent acquired seat in the Parliament. Lewis’s election to the House of Commons replacing Beckford, happened four months after the first apparition of *The Monk*, in July 1796, and had allegedly led Lewis to a greater self-esteem and awareness of his skills. After the writer’s avowal, the book had a successful sale among the English readership even if it was attacked for immorality. Indeed, there was a third edition in April of the following year, and even a fourth expurgated version on 28 February 1798 under the title *Ambrosio, or, The Monk* for fear of being prosecuted. Nevertheless, before putting the novel into circulation, Lewis had already foreseen the expected reaction to *The Monk* and its influence on the British readership. In the Preface in imitation of Horace, Lewis had anticipated the public scandal it would have created after its perusal and the supposed last destination and final outcome of his book. Moreover, with a plea to his youth, Lewis justified what he had written and published. Vide:

“Go, then, and pass that dangerous bourn
Whence never book can back return”.

Or else:

“In some dark dirty corner thrown,
Mouldy with damp, with cobwebs strown,
Your leaves shall be the bookworm’s pray.
[...] Pray what may be the author’s age?
Your faults, no doubt will make it clear,
I scarce have seen my twentieth year [...]”
(Lewis, *The Monk’s Preface*, xiii).

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹³⁶ Kilgour, *cit.*, p. 165.

6.4 EARLY RECEPTION

Initially, the novel was well received and his author highly rated. However, there was only a tiny minority of literary critics who hailed the book as a masterpiece and fervently supported Lewis's good talents.

One of the few was the *Monthly Mirror* that on June 1796 extolled it as:

“[...] most masterly and impressive, [...] most interesting production [*where*] the whole is very skilfully managed, and reflects high credit on the judgement and imagination of the writer. Some little ballads are interspersed, which indicate no common poetical talents. [...] The stronger passions are finely delineated and exemplified in the progress of artful temptation working on self-sufficient pride, superstition and lasciviousness”.

On April 1797 the same periodical related again:

“[...] The author is universally allowed to be endowed with nature's best gift, genius, and in the work before us is generally acknowledge to discover throughout an imagination, rich, powerful, and fervid”.

The following year, on March 1798, it added, following the fourth revised version:

“The second perusal of this highly interesting work has afforded us more gratification, if possible, than the first”.

Moreover, on October 1796, the *Analytical Review* sided with the novelist. On the one hand, however, the reviewer criticized *The Monk* for being organized into two plots whose characters do not display many Gothic features compared with the applied superstitious elements. Conversely, on the other, he praised Ambrosio's character and the way in which Lewis had evoked the diabolical forces and the ghostly apparitions.

Surprisingly, even the *British Critic*, which was a preserver of Christianity, on June 1796, recognized the exceptional talent of Lewis and two years later, on August, his literary brilliance.

The Flapper for September 1796 fully appreciated the style and poetry, as well as the *Monthly Mirror* that attacked only the obscene episodes concerning the witchcraft and the erotic scenes. Likewise did the *European Magazine* for February 1797, which contested

the immoral and irreligious aspect of the novel, but valued Lewis's gift of fashioning the characters masterfully and of revitalizing the ancient ballads.

6.5 THE CONTROVERSIAL EVALUATION

Yet it is important to stress that the vast majority of critical responses to Lewis were overwhelmingly negative. This reaction is rather understandable because, as Berryman remarks, it was "one of the authentic prodigies of English fiction" which "has never quite become a standard novel"¹³⁷. The scholar's definition is well-founded if Cooper's list of the aforementioned eighteenth century yardsticks for a critical judgment is re-examined.

At this time *The Monk* outraged the literary critic since it was perceived as a potential threat to the established social order.

Following Cooper's threats one by one, one could see that Lewis's novel was thought to be a threat provoking the population to open rebellion. In this regard, the *European Magazine* for February 1797 recounted:

"What good purpose is to be answered by an *oblique attack* upon *venerable establishments*, we are at a loss to conjecture. We know that the presses of the Continent teemed with compositions of this character while the Revolution was preparing in France; yet what have the *infidels* who produced it substituted in the place of the *religion* they have banished?"

Even the Marquis de Sade in his *Idée sur les romans* (1799) considered it as "the inevitable outcome of the revolutionary upheaval which had been felt all over Europe". For de Sade, even though it is not set in France and it does not treat French culture, it is the product of the French Revolution anyway. The episode which better evokes the French uprising is that of the destruction of the convent and the savage attack on the Abbess. There would be a certain analogy between these two events, the real and the fictional ones, but no critics are able to couple the dismantlement of St. Clare's monastery with the

¹³⁷ Berryman, John, *Introduction to The Monk* by Lewis, New York, Grove Press, Inc, 1959, p. 11.

revolutionary facts. For some, such as André Parreaux, it could allude to the massacre which happened on September 1792, for others, such as Paulson, it symbolizes the demolition of the Bastille in 1789. According to Cooper, the revolt among the populace had sparked an immediate outcry, not only because of the barbaric way in which Lewis had narrated the story, but also because it was supposed to contain a justification for the rioters and their action. Thanks to this uprising, in fact, the novel ends with a happy ending whereas social order is finally restored.

As regards religion, *The Monk* was charged with sustaining the absurdity of the supernatural and superstitious beliefs in opposition to the authenticity of the Christian faith. The irreligiousness of the novel was highlighted by Coleridge's reappraisal in the *Critical Review* of February 1797. He asserted:

“Tales of enchantments and witchcraft can never be *useful*: our author has contrived to make them *pernicious*, by blending, with an irreverent negligence, all that is awfully true in religion with all that is most ridiculously absurd in superstition”.

In dealing with ghostly appearances, such as the Bleeding Nun's episode, and with fanciful characters, such as the figure of the Wandering Jew, the book seems to destabilize the authoritarian power of the Church. In some way, the author lamented its scope as if religion was no longer able to diffuse universal truths. Coleridge (1772-1834) fiercely disputed the novel with particular reference to the passage in which Antonia is reading the revised version of the Bible, deeming it blasphemous, impertinent and shameless:

“That prudent mother, while she admired the beauties of the sacred writings, was convinced that, unrestricted, no reading more improper could be permitted a young woman. Many of the narratives can only tend to excite ideas the worst calculated for a female breast: everything is called plainly and roundly by its name, and the annals of a brothel would scarcely furnish a greater choice of indecent expressions. Yet this is the book which young women are recommended to study, which is put into the hands of children, able to comprehend little more than those passages of which they had better remain ignorant, and which but too frequently incalculates the first alarm to the still-sleeping passions. [...] *Elvira* had in consequence made two resolutions respecting the Bible. The first was, that Antonia should not read it till she was of an age to feel its beauties and profit by its

morality. The second, that it should be copied out with her own hand, and all improper passages either altered or omitted" (p. 170).

The scandal over *The Monk* intrigued another writer, Thomas James Mathias (1754?-1835), the Treasurer to Queen Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Streliz. The fourth dialogue of his satirical poem *The Pursuits of Literature* brought out in 1803 contains an invective against Lewis. He resumed the same attack as Coleridge with a more reproachful tone.

At the beginning he underlined Lewis's social position:

"But there is a publication of the time too peculiar, and too important to be passed over in a general reprehension. There is nothing with which it may be compared. A legislator in our own parliament, a member of the House of Commons of Great Britain, and elected guardian and defender of the laws, the religion, and the good manners of the country, has neither scrupled nor blushed to depict, and to publish to the world, the arts of lewd and systematic seduction, and to thrust upon the nation the most open and unqualified blasphemy against the very code and volume of our religion. And all this, with his name, style and title, prefixed to the novel or romance called 'THE MONK'".

Afterwards, as well as Coleridge did, he dwelled on the seventh chapter of the novel, that in which Antonia devotes her attention to the revised version of her mother's Bible. He thus noticed:

"Whether the passages, which I have cited in a *popular* novel, have not a *tendency* to corrupt the minds of the people, and of the younger unsuspecting part of the female sex, by *traducing and discrediting* THE HOLY SCRIPTURES, is a matter of publick consideration. ...Religion is *part of the common law*, and therefore *whatever is an offence* against that, is an offence *against* THE COMMON LAW".

This brief passage resumes the threats which Cooper pins to the Gothic novel. Firstly, he blamed the book for corrupting the young readership's mind and perverting the middle-class female public. Secondly, he accused it of denigration towards the Protestant religion's guiding text, and of inciting people to trust supernatural forces. Thirdly, he asserted that the novel should have been censored since it had outraged the Bible and the

current law. Actually, at Lewis's time, blasphemy, as Parreaux points out, was illegal because it could foment revolution¹³⁸.

Then, Mathias quoted some other examples of authors who had been subjected to trial for having published obscene books¹³⁹. However, his aim was that of demanding to the Attorney-General, Sir John Scott, that Lewis should be prosecuted. In his dialogue, in fact, he stated:

“But we can feel that it is an object of moral and of national reprehension when a Senator openly and daringly violates his first duty to his country”.

Since Lewis feared the threat of legal action, he published the fourth edition of *The Monk* abolishing Ambrosio and Matilda's sexual drives and the monk's desire to violate Antonia. Allegedly, for this reason he was never punished. The idea of altering his original version had been suggested by Mathias who wrote in his *Pursuits*:

“The publication of this novel by a *Member of Parliament* is in itself so serious an offence to the publick, that I know not how the author can repair this breach of publick decency, but by suppressing it himself. Or he might omit the indecent and blasphemous passages in another edition; there is neither genius nor wit in them, and the work as a composition would receive great advantage. I wish he may at least take this advice”.

Moreover, for Cooper, the novel not only denigrates religion, but also critics who were used to warning the readership against irreverent literature. In some way, Lewis would have wanted to denounce the critics' aim. In other words, Elvira, Antonia's mother, would represent an allegory of the critic. As the latter protected the public from dangerous and immoral readings, so Elvira safeguards her daughter's too-premature adulthood by expurgating the Bible's “improper passages”. Therefore, Lewis had blamed those people who endangered the lives of others, supporting ignorance. Indeed, the hapless Antonia falls into Ambrosio's trap because she is unacquainted with sex and masculine gender.

¹³⁸ “Blasphemy was considered punishable mainly because it was seditious” (Parreaux, *cit.*, p. 139).

¹³⁹ The bookseller Edmund Curll, the theologian Thomas Woolston, the deist Peter Annet or else, the novelist John Cleland.

Even Raymond voices this reproach in his discourse regarding poetry with his page Theodore. The character argues that critics act out of jealousy or rancour so they cannot form objective judgments about a critical analysis of a work. The passage so recites:

“An author, whether good or bad, or between both, is an animal whom everybody is privileged to attack; for though all are not able to write books, all conceive themselves able to judge them. A bad composition carries with it its own punishment – contempt and ridicule; a good one excite envy, and entails upon its author a thousand mortifications” (pp. 129-130).

In addition, the third threat is that concerning the transgression of sex and sexual roles. In his review, Coleridge so stated:

“The temptations of Ambrosio are described with a libidinous minuteness, which, we sincerely hope, will receive its best and only adequate censure from the offended conscience of the author himself. The shameless harlotry of Matilda, and the trembling innocence of Antonia, are seized with equal avidity, as vehicles of the most voluptuous images; and though the tale is indeed a tale of horror”.

The *Monthly Mirror* for August 1797 lamented:

“A vein of obscenity, however, pervades and deforms the whole organization of this novel, which must ever blast, in a moral view, the *fair* fame that, in point of ability, it would have gained for the author; and which renders the work totally unfit for general circulation”.

At the outset of the novel, in fact, Matilda disguises herself as a novice, the young and gentle Rosario. Before his avowal to be a woman, Lewis uses the possessives his or her in order to highlight Rosario/Matilda’s mobile sex identity, the male and the female ones. Even as she discloses her secret to be a woman, she behaves in a masculine manner, rather uncommon to females. As far as Ambrosio is concerned, after having enjoyed Matilda, he mourns for her initial docility and sweetness as a novice. Ambrosio is not titillated by a strong, severe and austere man but by an effeminate one with traits and features of the fairer sex, hinting at a homosexual feeling, thus a real threat to patriarchy. Cooper argues further that the last reason of scandal over *The Monk* is its evil influence on the young. Though Coleridge from the very beginning of his review admitted that “we acknowledge, in the work before us, the offspring of no common genius” and that Matilda

is “the author’s masterpiece, and also that Lewis’s imagination is “rich, powerful, and fervid”, he was not able to ignore the many faults of the novel. In fact, he lamented that “if a parent saw *it* in the hands of a son or daughter, he might reasonably turn pale”¹⁴⁰.

Further on he wrote:

“Yet the most painful impression which the work left on our minds was that of great acquirements and splendid genius employed to furnish a *mormo*¹⁴¹ for children, a poison for youth, and a provocative for the debauchee”.

In this regard, Markham Ellis points out the book’s negative impact on female readership¹⁴². In the eighteenth century, novels were mainly read by women that could lobby hard their behaviour. As a licentious tale, Lewis’s *The Monk*, perverted the female mind as confirms William’s painting entitled “Luxury or the Comforts of a Rum p ford” of 1801. Indeed, it clearly portrays a woman wearing a sexy housecoat holding the novel *The Monk* and masturbating her pubes.

6.6 IN FAVOUR OF THE NOVEL

Though *The Monk* was slated by some critics, it was also extolled for Lewis’s skills, talent and ability of writing. One of its first advocates was an anonymous writer who published in *The Monthly Mirror* of April 1797 a letter entitled “A Friend to Genius”, “An Apology for The Monk”. It aimed at defending Lewis and “the moral excellence of the work”.

Firstly, it focuses on Lewis’s genius:

“The author is universally allowed to be endowed with nature’s best gift, genius, and in the work before us is generally acknowledge to discover throughout an imagination, rich, powerful, and fervid”.

¹⁴⁰ Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Review of The Monk*, *Critical Review*, vol. 19, (February 1797), pp. 194-200, quoted in *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook 1700-1820*, ed. by Clery, E. J. and Miles Robert, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 188.

¹⁴¹ According to the Greek mythology, mormo was a sort of vampire. Stories regarding this horrifying character were told to children in order to frighten them when they misbehaved.

¹⁴² Markham, *cit.*, p. 97.

Secondly, the defender espouses his idea that the novel has to be prized for its brilliancy despite the author's inaccuracy and licentiousness. Then he specifies that it is a critic's fault if the novel has been accused of blasphemy because people found their accusation on single passages of the book rather than considering it in its entirety. As a whole, he continues, the novel provides many lessons of virtue. From the very beginning, for instance, Ambrosio is depicted as a man who is predisposed to virtue and self-restrained passions. However, it is his acute awareness which leads the monk to act wrongly. Ambrosio knows well which are the many dangers exposed to men, but he sins all the same.

Thanks to the abbot's errors, the reader can learn that when a man yields the first time to vice, it will be difficult not to sink under the following traps. Thus, according to the "Friend" of the letter, this would be the moral lesson which Lewis wanted to give to his readers. *The Monk*, he argues further, is not based on a "vicious tendency" as critics had stated, but on a favourable tendency to the cause of virtue and morality.

In addition, the mysterious writer challenges Coleridge's statement regarding the novel as a bad example for the youth and the debauchee. He thinks that Ambrosio, as a "Man of Holiness", is more exposed to succumb to temptations than others, otherwise the plot is not very credible. Then he notes how improbable is the fact that the debauchee are outraged by Ambrosio's behaviour. Only his pureness and complete morality could have scandalized them or even incited them to commit more impure acts. Afterwards, he dwells on the young, lamenting Coleridge's assertion that the novel is "a poison for youth". For the anonymous author, in fact, they are so educated on morality, that the novel cannot negatively influence them, indeed it can include a more vivid example to strengthen this idea of sinlessness.

Moreover, he does not even agree with Coleridge's charge of irreligiousness. For him, the passage in which Antonia is reading her mother's revised version of the Bible can be seen

as the concrete manifestation of a moral code to prevent sin and vice, not surely as a discredit to the Holy Scriptures. He declared:

“The author, so far from deserving to be stigmatized as an enemy to Christianity, appears to me to be acting as one of its best friends, when he endeavours to prevent the mischief which may ensue from mixing what may be improper for young minds, with the rest of a work so generally excellent in its morality, so pure in its doctrines”.

The first objection to Mathias’ attack was made by another anonymous supporter of Lewis who inserted his protest in the pamphlet “Impartial Strictures on the Poem called ‘The Pursuits of Literature’ and particularly a Vindication of the Romance of ‘The Monk’ brought out in 1798. He refutes the charges of indecency, obscenity and impiety that Mathias had imputed to the book and he criticizes him for misrepresentation of Lewis’s novel. At the very beginning, he risked to confirm the current negative prejudice about *The Monk*, but later once he read it, he changed his opinion and he was thoroughly ashamed of his previous judgement. Actually, he asserted:

“I do not pretend to defend a bad book – I join the issue with you [the critics] in your opinion. I do not believe this to be such – I do not view it as a licentious or blasphemous work – I do not think it will either contaminate your morals, or bring your religion into contempt”.

He is perfectly aware of Lewis’s treatment of vice but he considers it as a useful example for humankind not to retreat from the path of virtue. He then points out how Ambrosio’s disintegration is perceived as a lesson of life and not as a reason for sinning. For the unknown author “the Romance of the Monk” is “a work of this nature – I see a good and useful moral to be drawn from it”. He finally added:

“I see that the first abandonment to vice leads on imperceptibly to an accumulation of wickedness. But I also see that such a conduct infallibly brings on the wretched victim the punishment due to his crimes. I view it as a beautiful allegory, wherein is depicted the snares and delusions by which vice accomplishes her triumph over virtue. [...] His [The monk’s] example was intended to inculcate the necessity of a proper distrust of ourselves, and the danger of placing too great confidence in our own virtues, and above all to teach us that the suppression of our passions from their right and natural course, is too frequently the means of diverting them into a much more dangerous channel”.

6.7 INFLUENCE ON LATER WRITERS

In nineteenth and twentieth France *The Monk* was well received and it enjoyed successful sales, above all among writers. Initially it captured Léon de Wailly's attention who translated it in 1840. Whereupon, in the first years of the twentieth century, the novel was rewritten by Antonin Artaud, a member of the Surrealist Movement whose leading representative was André Breton. This latter appreciated and praised Lewis's use of oneiric and marvellous visions close to the surrealist experiments founded upon the triumph of dreams and automatic writing over logic and rational thinking. The merits of Lewis's work were mentioned by Breton in the first Surrealist Manifesto of 1924. Actually, he exalted it as a literary model as one could remark below:

"In the realm of literature, only the marvelous is capable of fecundating works which belong to an inferior category such as the novel, and generally speaking, anything that involves storytelling. Lewis' *The Monk* is an admirable proof of this. It is infused throughout with the presence of the marvelous. Long before the author has freed his main characters from all temporal constraints, one feels them ready to act with an unprecedented pride. This passion for eternity with which they are constantly stirred lends an unforgettable intensity to their torments, and to mine. I mean that this book, from beginning to end, and in the purest way imaginable, exercises an exalting effect only upon that part of the mind which aspires to leave the earth and that, stripped of an insignificant part of its plot, which belongs to the period in which it was written, it constitutes a paragon of precision and innocent grandeur.* (What is admirable about the fantastic is that there is no longer anything fantastic: there is only the real). It seems to me none better has been done, and that the character of Matilda in particular is the most moving creation that one can credit to this *figurative* fashion in literature. She is less a character than a continual temptation. And if a character is not a temptation, what is he? An extreme temptation, she. In *The Monk* the "nothing is impossible for him who dares try" gives it its full, convincing measure. Ghosts play a logical role in the book, since the critical mind does not seize them in order to dispute them. Ambrosio's punishment is likewise treated in a legitimate manner, since it is finally accepted by the critical faculty as a natural denouement"¹⁴³.

When *The Monk by Lewis told by Antonin Artaud* was brought out in 1931 by Denoël & Steele, it did not alter the original plot except for an additional and footling character, that

¹⁴³ One may refer to the full text on:
<http://www.tcf.ua.edu/Classes/Jbutler/T340/SurManifesto/ManifestoOfSurrealism.htm>.

is a novice who usurps the identity of the Baron of Lindenberg's son. According to Pollock¹⁴⁴, Artaud's translation was a work of "encadrement", a modification to the paratext and an arduous operation of transcription as he had explained in the Advertisement of his novel¹⁴⁵.

On the one hand, Artaud set a new framework for the story, erasing the novel's three volume division adopted by Lewis and eliminating the preface but leaving the advertisement. In addition, he added a title to each chapter and many other notes and epigraphs as well as a Gospel verse at the end of the novel. On the other hand, Artaud copied Lewis much as an apprentice is used to imitate his master's painting. The French author did not aim at parodying Lewis's novel but at promoting a greater sense of humour in order to trace back to the reader's unconscious. He thought that:

"Le Moine ne vaut que par le naturel introduit dans des opérations surnaturelles e parce que le Marveilleux y devient un objet maniable, un état dans lequel on entre dans une autre chambre en ouvrant la porte ou poussant le rideau"¹⁴⁶.

Artaud stuck to the original text as regards the plot, the sequence of episodes, the narrative structure and the characters. What he modified was the style of the story, otherwise called by Pollock the *diction*, namely the selection of the terms for personalizing his writing.

Thus, he added more words than Lewis for the purpose of enriching sentences, suffice it to quote Pollock's example of Antonia's eyes. Lewis wrote that "her mild blue eyes seemed a heaven of sweetness" (p. 4), whereas Artaud described them as "deux yeux d'un blue intraduisible, mouillé, clair, vibrant, exposé au soleil"¹⁴⁷. As one can pointedly remark, where Lewis used merely the adjective "mild", Artaud inserted four of them. Obviously, it is

¹⁴⁴ Pollock, Jonathan, *Jonathan Pollock présente Le Moine (de Lewis) d'Antonin Artaud*, Paris, Gallimard, 2002, p. 15.

¹⁴⁵ "[...] n'est ni une traduction, ni une adaptation [...] mais une sorte de «copie» en français du texte anglais original" (Artaud, Antonin, *Le Moine (de Lewis)*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966, p. 9).

¹⁴⁶ Pollock, *cit.*, p. 30.

¹⁴⁷ Artaud, *cit.*, p. 20.

not the aim of the present study to research what kind of vocabulary is adopted by both authors. Conversely, it is important to stress how the style of the novel reflects Artaud's personality, although it deals with a copying of Lewis's work. Indeed, he displayed many images which capture the reader's attention for their colours and lights and for causing corporal sensations among its spectators as if it was really, as he wrote in the Advertisement, "un peintre qui copierait le chef-d'œuvre d'un maître ancien"¹⁴⁸.

Moreover, both novels differ from each other in tone and rhythm. Artaud reduced the narrative periods compared with those more prolix of Lewis, rendering the progress of the story much more poetical and humoristic. Lewis, in fact, distinguishes himself for the fictional way of writing, such as the use of different points of view, the sequence of episodes, and the final disentanglement of the plot with the right dosage of suspense. On the contrary, Artaud has a poetical approach since he uses a descriptive and evocative language to present the most emotional part of mankind. Focusing on his sense of humour, Artaud's writing is imbued with colloquial terms rather than Lewis's literary ones. For instance, at the outset of the novel, he describes the crowded Church of the Capuchins with the word "bondée"¹⁴⁹ whereas Lewis uses the solemn verb "thronged with auditors" (p. 1).

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, I would like to explain further the chief reasons why I have chosen the title of this study which, at once, could appear improper.

The term “patchwork”, indeed, has several meanings though it normally means “a type of needlework in which small pieces of fabric of different colours or designs are sewn together”¹⁵⁰. It is worth dwelling on this assemblage of things because both Lewis and his work are a varied and, sometimes, a complicated constellation. I express myself clearly.

The first part of this thesis begins by focusing on a general introduction to the Gothic genre and its more common features and by considering the first wave of Gothic novels starting with Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* and ending with *Vathek* by Beckford. In this regard, the Gothic genre proceeded along two staple strands, one akin to the standard Gothicism of Walpole, Radcliffe, Lee and Reeve where the morals are finally restored and rewarded, the other similar to the libertine fiction filled with controversial topics such as the pact with the devil, the stream of human passions and the abandonment of any religious principles. Lewis’s masterpiece, *The Monk*, is therefore constructed according to these two different Gothic genres. On the one hand, it reverts to the morality so long pursued by the first authors, on the other it maintains the thorny themes of the French libertine books. Ambrosio and the prioress’s disintegration testifies the divine punishment for sinning whereas Agnes, Raymond, Ambrosio and Matilda show the human frailty before the greatness of God and before the opportunity to love.

Secondly, the following section of this research concerns the life of Matthew Gregory Lewis and once again one can notice how the author developed a multiple personality during his existence. He was, in fact, a novelist, a playwright, a poet and a composer, but

¹⁵⁰ Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2000.

he also had different behavioural difficulties stemming from his parents' separation, the pathological attachment to his mother, the troubled relationship with his father and with his alleged homosexuality during a period of strong homophobia.

Thirdly, the novel, as well as its author, came under several influences of Germanic, Latin, English and Italian origins. *The Monk* seems to have been formed by many themes which were inserted together in order to form a mere chef-d'oeuvre. The similar existential path of Ambrosio and Faust and their knowing intercourse with Lucifer are only two sources of Lewis's inspiration. Then, there is also the reuse of some poems or plays by Horace, Shakespeare, Tasso, Pope, Lee, Blair, Cowper, Prior and Thomson that together with some ancient Danish or Spanish ballads foreshadow what will happen in the following pages of the book. As a literary pastiche, the novel also displays Lewis's indebtedness and tribute to Beckford's *Vathek* and finally his remarkable response to Ann Radcliffe's narrative as far as the Gothic setting, the feeling of terror and the interest for sexual appetites are concerned.

Furthermore, the novel offers a huge variety of themes which reflect the eighteenth century English society, namely the anti-Catholicism, the hierarchical division of the social order and the sexual appeal among people. These knotty issues brought Lewis and his novel to become the subject-matter of both positive and negative judgments.

That is why I have decided to allot the title of "a literary patchwork" to the novel *The Monk*. In other terms, it appears as a puzzle of diverse critical material, that is as a matching of genres, influences, themes and critical valuations.

In a final analysis, I would like you to meditate on Ambrosio's tragic end. Allegedly, divine justice has prevailed and the friar's death is the fitting punishment for having committed several sins. He pays dearly for his mistakes, namely, for matricide, fratricide, incest and for having loved more than one woman although he was a priest. Being obliged to observe the basic rules of his monastic order, Ambrosio is not allowed to release his sexual

feelings. Is it not this ban which leads him to the eternal damnation? I think so. Just as Nosferatu the Vampyre in the film by Werner Herzog asserts that “the absence of love is the most abject pain” so mankind, of whom the monk is a representative, needs love, the motivating power of our life.

APPENDIX

Hereafter, one can read a collection of poems which Lewis enclosed in his novel with a view to recovering some examples of ancient poetry and to preparing the reader to face the more climactic scenes. In so doing, Lewis anticipates some episodes which will unfold in the course of the story.

The first ballad one can encounter is *The Gipsy's song* at the beginning of the novel after the awful nightmare about Antonia's future Lorenzo has experienced the previous day. Besides this strange dream, our author uses the sorceress' recital in order to warn us of Antonia's dangers which are soon after confirmed by the gipsy's accurate prediction. Actually, the last lines of the poem inform us that what she is saying is absolutely true as if she wants to alert both Antonia and the reader to her unhappy fate. Thus, the tragic end of the story is already disclosed from the outset of the novel even if neither the characters nor the readers give too much importance to her words.

The second poem deals with a suffered departure from a native land, namely that which involves Gonzalvo, Elvira's husband when he has had to leave Spain. *The Exile* seems to allude to the troubled relationship which could develop between Antonia and Lorenzo because of her financial difficulties. Once again, the ballad is introduced for comparing the two couples. Elvira fears that her poor daughter could spend a sad life with Lorenzo just like the one she has spent with her wealthy husband. The first lines of this poem were later a source of inspiration to Byron's Don Juan as the third text in this appendix reports.

The following ballad is sung by Don Raymond's page, Theodore, in the convent when he goes in search of Agnes. *The Water King* tells the story of a faithful girl, victim of a water-devil who murders her, after their wedding, by drowning her at sea. It was incorporated into the novel because its plot bears a significant similarity to Agnes' fate. Agnes has yielded to her passions, unable to avoid entanglement with Raymond just as the young

maid of the poem has done with the white-dressed devilish chief. Unbeknown to Theodore, Agnes is almost half-dead in a subterranean prison of the monastery because of her scandalous pregnancy. Therefore, she is paying for her unrestrained bodily needs as if it was a divine punishment manipulated and orchestrated by the earthly prioress.

The fifth poem mentioned below alludes to Matilda's attitude towards Ambrosio. The mild tone of her voice and her sinuous figure titillate the monk for the first time. Moreover, the love topics of the ballad focus on the courtly values of chivalry as if the sexual appeal for Matilda could be redeemed since devoid of lewdness. Once more, the tragic end of Durandarte in the Roncisvalles fight portends similar death of the friar of the title-role.

In a last analysis, the sixth text is a Spanish ballad entitled *Alonzo the Brave, and Fair Imogine* read by Antonia just before the ghostly apparition of her mother. Fittingly, the story revolves around the spectral Alonzo who has come to claim his old fiancée Imogine, just married to a baron. The poem is imbued with gothic elements such as fanciful and frightening figures and feelings since it ought to smooth the way for the realization of the following prophetic vision.

[1]

“Come, cross my hand! My art surpasses

All that did ever mortal know¹⁵¹:

Come, maidens, come! My magic¹⁵² glasses

Your future husband’s form can show:

For ’Tis to me the power is given,

Unclosed, the book of Fate to see;

To read the fixed¹⁵³ resolves of Heaven,

And dive into futurity.

I guide the pale moon’s silver wagon;

The winds in magic bonds I hold;

I charm to sleep the crimson dragon,

Who loves to watch o’er buried gold¹⁵⁴.

Fenced round with spells, unhurt I venture

Their sabbath strange where witches keep;

Fearless the sorcerer’s circle enter,

and woundless tread on snakes asleep¹⁵⁵.

Lo! Here are charms of mighty power!

This makes secure an husband’s truth;

¹⁵¹ Mortal: highlights the supernatural ability to foresee people’s fate.

¹⁵² Magic: adjective that indicates her magic powers.

¹⁵³ Fixed: adjective that demonstrates our destiny as already decided by superior forces.

¹⁵⁴ Pale, Silver, Crimson, Gold: colours which recall a mysterious and exotic atmosphere.

¹⁵⁵ Quatrain full of references to black magic: spells, Sabbath, witches, sorcerer’s circle and snakes.

And this, composed at midnight¹⁵⁶ hour,
 Will force to love the coldest youth.

If any maid too much has granted,
 Her loss this philtre¹⁵⁷ will repair.
 This blooms a cheek where red is wanted,
 And this will make a brown girl fair.

Then silent hear, while I discover
 What I in Fortune's mirror view;
 And each, when many a year is over,
 Shall own the gipsy's sayings true" ¹⁵⁸

(p. 20).

¹⁵⁶ Midnight: in the gothic genre midnight is considered the most esoteric moment to evoke evil forces. Indeed, Matilda waits until nightfall to summon diabolic powers in the subterranean vaults of the monastery.

¹⁵⁷ Philtre: word used in magic.

¹⁵⁸ The gipsy's final verse shows the reader that her predictions (in particular those referring to Antonia) will come true.

[2]

“Farewell, oh native Spain! Farewell for ever!

These banished eyes shall view thy coasts no more!

A mournful presage¹⁵⁹ tells my heart that never

Gonzalvo’s steps again shall press thy shore.

Hush’d are the winds; while soft the vessel, sailing

With gentle motion, ploughs th’ unruffled main,

I feel my bosom’s boasted courage failing,

And curse the waves which bear me far from Spain.

I see it yet! Beneath yon blue clear heaven

Still do the spires, so well-belov’d, appear:

From yonder craggy point, the gale of even

Still wafts my native accent to mine ear.

Propp’d on some moss-crown’d rock, and gaily singing,

There in the sun his nets the fisher dries;

Of have I heard the plaintive ballad, bringing

Scenes of past joys before my sorrowing eyes¹⁶⁰.

Ah, happy swain! He waits th’ accustomed hour,

When twilight-gloom obscures the closing sky;

¹⁵⁹ Mournful presage: reference to the tragic end of the love story between Lorenzo and Antonia. In fact, in the line which follows Gonzalvo may be identified with Lorenzo to the extent that as Gonzalvo was unable to return to the Spanish coast, so there will be no future for Lorenzo and Antonia.

¹⁶⁰ Scenes of past joys ... sorrowing eyes: reference to Lorenzo’s happiness with Antonia that is interrupted even before being enjoyed.

Then gladly seeks his lov'd paternal bower,
 And shares the feast his native fields supply.

Friendship and Love, his cottage guests, receive him
 With honest welcome and with smile sincere¹⁶¹:
 No threatening woes of present joys bereave him;
 No sigh his bosom owns – his cheek no tear.

Ah, happy swain! Such bliss to me denying¹⁶²,
 Fortune thy lot with envy bids me view;
 Me, who, from home and Spain an exile flying,
 Bid all I value, all I love, adieu!

No more mine ear shall list the well-known ditty
 Sung by some mountain-girl, who tends her goats –
 Some village-swain imploring amorous pity,
 Or shepherd chanting wild his rustic notes¹⁶³.

No more my arms a parent's fond embraces –
 No more my heart domestic calm must know!
 Far from these joys, which sights which memory traces,
 To sultry skies and distant climes I go –

¹⁶¹ Gonzalvo's welcome in a foreign country can be compared to the greeting Elvira reserves for Lorenzo. She agrees to the marriage between the two lovers but she warns Lorenzo about the class difference that exists between him and her daughter, advising him to ask his uncle for permission to marry a girl poorer than him.

¹⁶² Such bliss ... denying: anticipation of an unhappy love between Lorenzo and Antonia.

¹⁶³ Quatrain which describes a bucolic landscape. It recalls the low social condition of Antonia. As Gonzalvo will never again hear the typical music of his homeland, so Lorenzo will never again see Antonia.

Where Indian suns engender new diseases,
 Where snakes and tigers¹⁶⁴ breed, I bend my way;
 To brave the feverish thirst no art appeases,
 The yellow plague, and madding blaze of day.

But not to feel slow pangs consume my liver
 To die by piecemeal in the bloom of age,
 My boiling blood drank my insatiate fever,
 And brain delirious with the day-star's rage¹⁶⁵,

Can make me know such grief, as thus to sever,
 With many a bitter sigh, dear land! from thee;
 To feel this heart must dote on thee for ever,
 And feel that all thy joys are torn from me!¹⁶⁶

Ah, me! How oft will fancy's spells, in slumber,
 Recall my native country to my mind!
 How oft regret will bid me sadly number
 Each lost delight, and dear friend left behind!¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Snakes, Tigers, Diseases, Plague: Gonzalvo went to India, land of many dangers. This can be seen as a reference to Lorenzo's situation. He is about to face troubles which will render the "domestic calm" of the previous quatrain nearly a distant memory.

¹⁶⁵ Pangs, Liver, Die, Boiling, Blood, Fever, Brain Delirious, Rage: terms which indicate death.

¹⁶⁶ Nostalgic quatrain where Gonzalvo remembers his homeland. This bitter memory is like that of Lorenzo for Antonia. Indeed, after her death, "the image of that lovely and unfortunate girl still lived in his heart" (p. 276).

¹⁶⁷ Once again a nostalgic quatrain. It echoes the memory of a "dear friend". Probably, Lorenzo calls Antonia with the name of "friend" because their mutual love had not been openly expressed.

Wild Murcia's vales and loved romantic bowers,
 The river on whose banks a child I play'd,
 My castle's ancient halls, its frowning towers,
 Each much-regretted wood, and well-known glade¹⁶⁸;

Dreams of the land where all my wishes centre,
 Thy scenes, which I am doomed no more to know,
 Full oft shall memory trace, my soul's tormentor,
 And turn each pleasure past to present woe!

But, lo! The sun beneath the waves retires;
 Night speeds apace her empire to restore;
 Clouds from my sight obscure the village spires,
 Now seen but faintly, and now seen no more¹⁶⁹.

Oh! breathe not, winds! Still be the water's motion!
 Sleep, sleep, my bark, in silence on the main!
 So when to-morrow's light shall gild the ocean,
 Once more mine eyes shall see the coast of Spain¹⁷⁰.

Vain is the wish! My last petition scorning,
 Fresh blows the gale, and high the billows swell:

¹⁶⁸ Link between the two tragic destinies of father and daughter portrayed in the description of the castle in Murcia, the dwelling of both.

¹⁶⁹ Sun, Retires, Night, Clouds, Obscure: references to the darkness that falls on Lorenzo's soul without a possible future with Antonia.

¹⁷⁰ Light, See: Gonzalvo dreams of seeing once more the coast of Spain. This hope could be an allusion to Lorenzo's meeting with Virginia. With the death of Antonia, Lorenzo falls prey to great sorrow, but the arrival of Virginia in his life enables him to hope for a brighter future.

Far shall we be before the break of morning;

Oh then, for ever, native Spain, farewell!¹⁷¹”

(pp. 140-141-142).

¹⁷¹ This final greeting of Gonzalvo can also be attributed to the last farewell of Lorenzo to Antonia because afterwards “Antonia’s image was gradually effaced from his bosom” (p. 276).

[3]

“Farewell, my Spain! a long farewell!” he cried,

“Perhaps I may revisit thee no more,

But die, as many an exiled heart hath died,

Of its own thirst to see again thy shore:

Farewell, where Guadalquivir’s waters glide!

Farewell, my mother! and, since all is o’er,

Farewell, too, dearest Julia!”

(http://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/don_juan_canto_2.pdf).

[4]

“With gentle murmur flowed the tide,
 While, by the fragrant flowery side,
 The lovely maid, with carols gay,
 To Mary’s church pursued her way¹⁷².”

The water-fiend’s malignant eye
 Along the banks beheld her hie;
 Straight to his mother-witch he sped,
 And thus in suppliant accents said:

‘Oh, mother, mother! Now advise
 How I may yonder maid surprise? –
 Oh, mother, mother! Now explain
 How I may yonder maid obtain?’

The witch, she gave him armour white,
 She formed him like a gallant knight;
 Of water clear next made her hand
 A steed, whose housings were of sand.

The water-king then swift he went;
 To Mary’s church his steps he bent:
 He bound his courser to the door,

¹⁷² The lovely maid ... pursued her way: lines which allude to Agnes’s vocation.

And paced the churchyard three times four¹⁷³.

His courser to the door bound he,

And paced the churchyard four times three;

Then hastened up the aisle, where all

The people flocked, both great and small.

The priest said, as the knight drew near:

‘And wherefore comes the white chief here?’

The lovely maid, she smiled aside:

‘Oh, would I were the white chief’s bride!’¹⁷⁴

He stepped o’er benches one and two;

‘Oh, lovely maid, I die for you!’

He stepped o’er benches two and three:

‘Oh, lovely maiden, go with me!’¹⁷⁵

Then sweet she smiled, the lovely maid;

And, while she gave her hand, she said:

‘Betide me joy, betide me woe,

O’er hill, o’er dale, with thee I do.’¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ He bound ... three times four: lines which refer to Don Raymond’s search for Agnes after her disappearance in the night when the Bleeding Nun paid him a visit. After having suffered some terrifying misfortunes during his stay at Lindenberg, Raymond returns to Spain and goes to St. Clare’s monastery where Agnes has taken her vows.

¹⁷⁴ Would ... bride: line which mirrors Agnes’s will to break her vows and marry Raymond because of her unplanned pregnancy. In the letter, which she has written to “arrange their plan of elopement”, she declares: “I am ready to fly with you. Write to me my husband” (p. 123).

¹⁷⁵ Oh, lovely ... go with me: official request which retraces that of Raymond in his letter addressed to Agnes. Indeed, he writes: “Remember that you had promised to be mine, long ere you engaged yourself to the church” (p. 27).

The priest their hands together joins¹⁷⁷:
 They dance, while clear the moonbeam shines;
 And little thinks the maiden bright,
 Her partner is the water-spright.

Oh, had some spirit deigned to sing,
 ‘Your bridegroom is the water-king!’
 The maid had fear and hate confessed,
 And cursed the hand which then she pressed¹⁷⁸.

But nothing giving cause to think
 How near she strayed to danger’s brink¹⁷⁹,
 Still on she went, and hand in hand
 The lovers reached the yellow sand –

‘Ascend¹⁸⁰ this steed with me, my dear!
 We needs must cross the streamlet here:
 Ride boldly in – it is not deep:
 The winds are hushed, the billows sleep.’

¹⁷⁶ O’er ... thee I do: statement which recalls Agnes’s firm decision to marry Raymond. She says “I have taken my resolution” (p. 123).

¹⁷⁷ Join: verb which echoes the strong bond between the two lovers, that is the future birth of their baby.

¹⁷⁸ And ... she pressed: invective similar to that of Agnes in her correspondence with Raymond: “Into what an abyss of misery have you plunged me! (...) And you are the cause of those agonies!” (p. 123).

¹⁷⁹ How near ... danger’s brink: prophetic line regarding Agnes’s fate after being discovered by Ambrosio and the abbess.

¹⁸⁰ Ascend: verb which recalls its antonym: Agnes’s “descent” into the dark dungeon of St. Clare’s monastery.

Thus spoke the water-king. The maid
 Her traitor-bridegroom's wish obeyed:
 And soon she saw the courser lave
 Delighted in his parent wave.

'Stop, stop, my love! The waters blue
 E' en now my shrinking foot bedew.'
 'Oh, lay aside your fears, sweet heart!
 We now have reached the deepest part'¹⁸¹

'Stop, stop, my love! – for now I see'¹⁸²
 The waters rise above my knee.'
 'Oh, lay aside your fears, sweet heart!
 We now have reached the deepest part'.

'Stop, stop! for God's sake, stop! – for, oh!
 The waters o'er my bosom flow!' –
 Scarce was the word pronounced, when knight
 And courser vanished from her sight'¹⁸³.

She shrieks, but shrieks in vain; for high
 The wild winds rising dull the cry;

¹⁸¹ Deepest Part: superlative form of the adjective. It alludes to Agnes's internment in a subterranean cell of the church.

¹⁸² Stop ... now I see: whereas in this ballad the young girl is sentenced to death by the Water-King, in *The Monk* Raymond is only the cause of Agnes's seclusion. On the contrary, her fate is ruled by the wicked and cruel prioress.

¹⁸³ The young maiden's pleadings retrace those of Agnes when "she besought" the prioress's "mercy in the most passionate and frantic terms" (p. 269).

The fiend exults; the billows dash,
 And o'er their hapless victim wash¹⁸⁴.

Three times, while struggling¹⁸⁵ with the stream,
 The lovely maid was heard to scream;
 But when the tempest's rage was o'er,
 The lovely maid was seen no more¹⁸⁶.

Warned by this tale, ye damsels fair,
 To whom you give your love beware!
 Believe not every handsome knight,
 And dance not with the water-spright"¹⁸⁷
 (pp. 188-189-190).

¹⁸⁴ This tormenting description of the young girl's fight for life may be compared with Agnes's effort to soften Mother St. Agatha's resolution of confinement which ends with her senseless fall.

¹⁸⁵ Struggling: verb which refers to Agnes's struggle for survive in her cell since her "existence was still dear to" her (p. 273).

¹⁸⁶ The lovely ... no more: as the girl of this ballad expires, so Agnes disappears from the convent. The abbess explains to Lorenzo, Raymond and Theodore that Agnes has died and her funeral has already been held.

¹⁸⁷ Quatrain which contains a warning address to all women. It advises them against yielding to those passions which may endanger their lives.

[5]

“Sad and fearful is the story¹⁸⁸

Of the Roncevalles fight;

On those fatal plains of glory¹⁸⁹

Perish’d many a gallant knight.

There fell Durandarte: never

Verse a nobler chieftain named:

He, before his lips for ever

Closed in silence, thus exclaimed:

‘Oh, Belerma! Oh, my dear one,

For my pain and pleasure born!¹⁹⁰

Seven long years I served thee, fair one¹⁹¹;

Seven long years my fee was scorn¹⁹².

‘And when now thy heart, replying

To my wishes, burns like mine;

Cruel fate my bliss denying¹⁹³,

Bids me every hope resign¹⁹⁴.

¹⁸⁸ Sad ... story: the “sad” and “fearful” story of Durandarte can be compared with that of Ambrosio.

¹⁸⁹ Glory: term which echoes Ambrosio’s eternal damnation for vanity, pride and lust.

¹⁹⁰ Pain, Pleasure: two antonyms. Belerma can be identified with Matilda who is sent by Satan both to punish and please the monk.

¹⁹¹ Seven ... fair one: number “seven” and verb “served” refer to Satan’s service to Ambrosio. He can demand for the Devil’s help by reading the “four first lines of the seventh page” (p. 283) of Matilda’s book.

¹⁹² Seven ... was scorn: recurrence of number “seven”, this time together with the term “fee”, word which implies payment. Ambrosio too had to pay for his submission to the Devil’s will with seven days of corporal punishments before dying.

¹⁹³ Cruel ... denying: reference to Ambrosio’s awful fate after the gratification of his own desires.

Ah, though young I fall, believe me,
 Death would never claim a sight;
 'Tis to lose thee, 'tis to leave thee,
 Makes me think it hard to die!

'Oh! my cousin Montesinos;
 By that friendship firm and dear
 Which from youth has lived between us,
 Now my last petition hear:

'When my soul, these limbs forsaking,
 Eager seeks a purer air,
 From my breast the cold heart taking,
 Give it to Belerma's care¹⁹⁵.

'Say, I of my lands possessor
 Named her with my dying breath:
 Say, my lips I oped to bless her,
 Ere they clos'd for aye in death!

'Twice a week, too – how sincerely
 I adored her, cousin, say –¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Hope resign: allusion to Matilda's words regarding Ambrosio's hopeless future: "you are doomed to eternal damnation" (p. 282).

¹⁹⁵ Quatrain which retraces the loss of Ambrosio's soul after the pact with the Devil. As Durandarte begs Belerma to take care of his "cold heart", so Ambrosio asks Satan for eternal protection (p. 287).

Twice a week, for one who dearly
Loved her, cousin, bid her pray.

'Montesinos, now the hour
Marked by fate is near at hand:
Lo, my arm has lost its power!
Lo, I drop my trusty brand¹⁹⁷.

'Eyes, which forth beheld me going,
Homewards ne'er shall see me hie:
Cousin, stop those tears o'erflowing,
Let me on thy bosom die.

'Thy kind hand my eyelids closing,
Yet one favour I implore:
Pray thou for my soul's reposing,
When my heart shall throb no more.

'So shall Jesus, still attending,
Gracious to a Christian's vow,
Pleased accept my ghost ascending,
And a seat in heaven allow'¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Twice, adored: the numeral "twice" and the verb "adored" recall the two years Ambrosio spent in adoration of the Virgin's portrait. Indeed, the picture: "for two years had been the object of his increasing wonder and adoration"; "it is the divinity" he "adores" (p. 24).

¹⁹⁷ Quatrain which alludes to Ambrosio's downfall before diabolical powers. The monk resigns himself to his fate as well as Durandarte who declares himself beaten by throwing his sword down.

Thus spoke gallant Durandarte;
 Soon his brave heart broke in twain:
 Greatly joyed the Moorish party,
 That the gallant knight was slain¹⁹⁹.

Bitter weeping, Montesinos
 Took from him his helm and glaive;
 Bitter weeping, Montesinos
 Dug his gallant cousin's grave.

To perform his promise made, he
 Cut the heart from out the breast;
 That Belerma, wretched lady,
 Might receive the last bequest.

Sad was Montesinos' heart, he
 Felt distress his bosom rend.
 'Oh, my cousin Durandarte,
 Woe is me to view thy end!²⁰⁰

'Sweet in manners, fair in favour,

¹⁹⁸ Lines in which reverberate Ambrosio's will to ask for God's pardon despite his crimes. After the Devil's avowal, in fact, Ambrosio pleads for divine mercy by "raising his hands towards heaven" (p. 290) and he answers to Matilda that "God is merciful, and I will not despair of pardon" (p. 283).

¹⁹⁹ Reference to Ambrosio's death.

²⁰⁰ The sorrow felt by Montesinos can be compared with God's sadness for having lost one of His missing children.

Mild in temper, fierce in fight:
Warrior nobler, gentler, braver!
Never shall behold the light²⁰¹.

‘Cousin, lo, my tears bedew thee!
How shall I thy loss survive!
Durandarte, he who slew thee,
Wherefore left he me alive?’
(pp. 47-48-49).

²⁰¹ Sweet, Fair, Mild, Fierce, Warrior, Gentler: terms which characterised *l'amour courtois*. Matilda sings this ballad to demonstrate how her love towards Ambrosio is innocent and pure like that of the troubadour poetry.

[6]

“A warrior so bold and a virgin so bright
Convers’d, as they sat on the green;
They gaz’d on each other with tender delight:
Alonzo the Brave was the name of the knight,
The maid’s was the Fair Imogine.

‘Andoh,’ said the youth, ‘since to-morrow I go
To fight in a far distant land,
Your tears for my absence soon leaving to flow,
Some other will court you, and you will bestow
On a wealthier suitor your hand.’

‘Oh, hush these suspicions!’ Fair Imogine said,
‘Offensive to love and to me!
For, if you be living or if you be dead,
I swear by the Virgin, that none in your stead
Shall husband of Imogine be!

‘Ife’er I, by lust or by wealth led aside,
Forget my Alonzo the Brave,
God grant, that, to punish my falsehood and pride,
Your ghost at the marriage may sit by my side,
May tax me with perjury, claim me as bride,
And bear me away to the grave!’

To Palestine hastened the hero so bold;
 His love she lamented him sore:
 But scarce had a twelvemonth elapsed, when behold,
 A baron all covered with jewels and gold
 Arrived at Fair Imogine's door.

His treasure, his presents, his spacious domain,
 Soon made her untrue to her vows:
 He dazzled her eyes; he bewildered her brain;
 He caught her affections so light and so vain,
 And carried her home as his spouse.

And now had the marriage been blest by the priest;
 The revelry now was begun:
 The tables they groaned with the weight of the feast;
 Nor yet had the laughter and merriment ceased,
 When the bell of the castle told – 'one!'²⁰²

Then first with amazement Fair Imogine found
 That a stranger was placed at her side:
 His air was terrific; he uttered no sound;
 He spoke not, he moved not, he looked not around,
 But earnestly gazed on the bride.

²⁰² When ... one: the clock's stroke echoes that of the novel before Elvira's apparition. The difference lies in the hour; in the ballad at one o'clock while in *The Monk* at three o' clock.

His vizor was closed, and gigantic his height;
His armour was sable to view:
All pleasure and laughter were hushed at his sight;
The dogs, as they eyed him, drew back in affright;
The lights in the chamber burned blue!

His presence all bosoms appeared to dismay;
The guests sat in silence and fear.
At length spoke the bride, while she trembled: 'I pray,
Sir Knight, that your helmet aside you would lay,
And deign to partake of our cheer.'

The lady is silent: the stranger complies:
His vizor he slowly unclosed:
Oh God! – what a sight met Fair Imogine's eyes!
What words can express her dismay and surprise,
When a skeleton's head was exposed!

All present then uttered a terrified shout,
All turned with disgust from the scene:
The worms they crept in, and the worms they crept out,
And sported his eyes and his temples about,
While the spectre addressed Imogine:

'Behold me, thou false one! Behold me!' he cried;
Remember Alonzo the Brave!

God grant that, to punish thy falsehood and pride,
My ghost at thy marriage should sit by thy side,
Should tax thee with perjury, claim thee as bride,
And bear thee away to the grave!

Thus saying, his arms round the lady he wound,
While loudly she shrieked in dismay;
Then sank with his pray through the wide-yawning ground:
Nor ever again was Fair Imogine found,
Or the spectre who bore her away.

Not long lived the baron; and none, since that time,
To inhabit the castle presume;
For chronicles tell that, by order sublime,
There Imogine suffers the pain of her crime,
And mourns her deplorable doom.

At midnight four times in each year does her spright,
When mortals in slumber are bound,
Array'd in her bridal apparel of white,
Appear in the hall with the Skeleton-Knight,
And shriek as he whirls her around.

While they drink out of skulls newly torn from the grave,
Dancing round them the spectres are seen:
Their liquor is blood, and this horrible stave

They howl: 'To the health of Alonzo the Brave,
And his consort, the False Imogine!'"²⁰³

(pp. 205-206-207).

²⁰³ This ballad has no particular references to the novel's scenes. Lewis wanted to insert it in order to foreshadow Elvira's ghostly apparition and to prepare the reader for this vision. Here the intention was to emphasize those verbs, names and adjectives which usually characterize fearful images in English gothic literature, triggering sentiments of terror, panic, dismay, distress, disgust, anxiety and horror both in readers and characters' soul.

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