Analysis of Matthew G. Lewis's The Monk

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1. Introduction

Through the years, Gothic became a fashionable term for a certain style in literature, art and even films. In fact, those years span for centuries, as the tropes of Gothic fiction were consciously created by authors ranging from the fall of Enlightenment to the end of Romanticism. These authors used the term intentionally to describe their works. Despite these conscious efforts, no exact and straightforward definition exist for the Gothic, which seems to me more about the atmosphere. It is a certain satisfaction and fascination derived from gloom, darkness and melodramatic suffering, all blended in a special cocktail, with generous amounts of sinister architecture added to the mix. Probably the most interesting fact about the Gothic is that it managed to stay as fresh today as it was many centuries ago. The genre is a huge part of today's pop culture which influenced a generous number of films, video games, comic books and other popular media, with its conventions and narrative tools more or less the same as their old counterparts.

For example, many of the ground-breaking films of early cinema, which helped to shape this new form of entertainment to a worldwide industry, were German Expressionist horror films. They relied much on the conventions of Gothic literature while trying to bring the heavy visuality of the texts to the screen. These early experiments helped to lay down basic cinematographic techniques that have been used ever since in many genres. In fact, cinema owes so much to the Gothic, that without it, films wouldn't be the same. It can be said that it is a literary genre worthy of discussions and critique, for its long lasting legacy is more than prevalent in today's world, even though it has only been recognised as an important research topic since the past few decades. Part of the reason lies in the perceived superficiality of the genre which may border that of kitsch.

Many still dispute about whether Gothic is serious literature or not. Is it nothing more than a pleasantly haunted theatre with its dark backdrops and ghostly gimmicks or is it something more? The question is still disputed, and I do not wish to take a side in it, for it seems to me a matter of taste. However, I am sure about the fact that there lies a hidden system of symbols, motifs and social comments waiting to be revealed deep inside the suffocating excesses that Gothic stand for, which can lead to significant conclusions. It is the purpose of this thesis to reveal many of them without taking any sides about the prestige and quality of a literary genre that is destined to changes with the rather capricious climate of politics.
1.1 Why the Monk? - An Introduction on the Novel

If I desire to go further, I must be willing to dissect a specimen of this rather misunderstood species of fiction; a novel that can stand for the genre itself, and the perfect candidate for that is The Monk by M. G. Lewis. It is considered by many the quintessential Gothic novel and one of the earliest examples of the genre. It is scary, gloomy and outrageous even for the modern audience. With many scenes of violence and rape provided for the imagination of the reader to feast and shiver upon, one may be surprised to find it was written in the end of the 18th century. In fact, if the pages of the novel are able to shock a reader of our days, we may wonder about the reception of The Monk when it was first published in 1796. We can almost surely assume that it was the target of both great public outrage and moralising critics. The history of the novel shows that it was republished several times by the writer to make it and himself more accepted to the public (Fitzgerald 2). After all, the infamy Lewis gathered was as much as his critical acclaim.

For the representation of institutionalised religion as being corrupted, it was criticised as being immoral and a case of bad taste, which is no wonder if one considers that it portrays a monk as a suppressed animal, a chained beast waiting to be unleashed to bring pain and destruction. Ambrosio, the aforementioned preacher, is a classic prototype of the Gothic villain and is the source of most horror and outrage in the story. He stands as one of the most scandalous characters of Gothic literature. But perhaps his extreme portrayal led to the immense popularity of the novel, which inspired a rank of followers to come; many of them becoming classics on their own.

As I stated earlier, I wish to use this novel as the model of Gothic literature through which the conventions of the genre can be observed. To achieve this, I chose a research method that has a different approach than the traditional Western way of linear and logical reasoning guided by clear objectives. Instead, I implemented a thinking that stands closer to stream of consciousness writing with the application of personal impressions and recognising patterns that are based on free association (followed, of course, by heavy editing). The only objective I set up for the research is to not leave my thoughts unfinished, which, like a tree, may grow into many branches and many conclusions that can reveal significant interpretations of the text. In other words, this thesis is an eclectic journey dictated by the impressions of an average university student; a person of the 21st century. As a result, it shows how a modern audience may feel about the novel and what their
interpretations are. The topics and themes that will be discussed are Gothic architecture, archetypical interpretation based on genders, character analysis and the recurring anti-Catholicism in the text and the multiple dualities that are central to this piece of literature.
2. Gothic Architecture and Catholicism

Recurring instances of Gothic art and architecture provide the background of the story. The modern reader may wonder, what is about the medieval Gothic cathedral that makes it that sinister to inspire horror tales? How did a structure, that is built to be a beacon of light (Wilson 36), a spire that connects sacred worlds, suddenly become a haunted maze that attracts anything evil nearby? An important thing is that everything depends on the point of view. Gothic buildings can indeed be frightening in the darkness, or when they are illuminated from certain angles. After all, the graceful pillars that create the harmonic proportion of the structure can easily be turned into beastly skeletal parts with the correct lighting applied. Is it just superficial theatricality on the part of the writer? A conveniently horrific place for a horrific tale to use? Or is there something more about it? In order to investigate that, one has to examine the reason why buildings look the way they look, because beauty rarely stands for its own sake when it comes to architecture; most of the time it has an agenda to serve. In this case, it is the might of the institution that it belongs to, the Catholic Church. Every organisation that is capable of giving birth to such a massive construction as the Gothic cathedral must indeed be powerful, and power is sinister on its own right. Especially for the English it is true, as their relationship with the papal institution was a stormy one. It led to England’s separation from Vatican and the establishment of the Church of England, which is partially based on Protestant ideology (however, it still borrows some elements of the Catholic Church). For an Englishman at that time, Catholicism could be easily regarded (and is still regarded) as superstitious, control freak and even hypocritical. Its mysticism, superstitions and the great clerical wealth opposes the basic Christian teachings of a humble and ascetic life. The strict hierarchy that defines the church is clearly reflected in the vertical construction of the cathedral, and its awe-inspiring height which clearly shows the place of the average visitor in both the universe and in the institution. The novel is full of motifs which can be regarded as a criticism to the Church and its conducts. The first church scene, in which the masses were summoned for the sermon, contains a peculiar sight.
Boys suspended themselves upon the wings of Cherubim; St. Francis and St. Mark bore each a spectator on his shoulders; and St. Agatha found herself under the necessity of carrying double. The consequence was, that in spite of all their hurry and expedition, our two newcomers, on entering the Church, looked round in vain for places. (pg. 6)

As it can be read, all the common people of the neighbourhood are there and the building starts to become so crowded that children can’t find any places to sit down. Their solution is to climb the statues, which soon become full of clinging children. Suddenly, the sublime ornamentation of the building becomes a funny sight with its delicate statues loaded with noisy kids. They subjugate these sacred products of artistic vision for the common needs of mortal things. It is an interesting subversion of the Catholic hierarchy and can be seen as a subtle way to ridicule excessive Catholic aesthetics and its thirst for the theatrical display of ornamentation.

However, it is not the usual representation of architecture in the novel. After all, a bunch of kids hanging on statues is too comical and breezy to fit to the standards of Gothic fiction. Instead, it is a case of dramatic duality. Both the haunted and the sacred aspects of the cathedral are represented, which creates the contrast. It encompasses darkness and light; evil and good. Usually, if a man walks in a cathedral, the ornamentation forces him to look upwards; to cast his eyes upon heaven, while the catacombs and crypt are hidden in the basement below. The original philosophy behind the Gothic cathedral is to create a miniature copy of the universe, which is still large enough for people to remind them the vastness of cosmic forces and the power of God. As I mentioned before, they were intended to be beacons of light to make even the occasional visitor feel like they are bathing in some kind of radiant goodness that is inherent in the universe. The universe and God are good, and the cathedral suggests that. This is in stark contrast with the shadows that Gothic fiction casts upon this monumental shrine. As it is painted in darkness, all those delicate in-built enclosures and pillars that are embedded into each other suddenly become holders of secrets, like in the following example.

The shadow thrown by the Column, effectually concealed him from the Stranger, who continued to advance with caution. At length He drew a letter from beneath his cloak, and hastily placed it beneath a Colossal Statue of St. Francis' (pg. 16)
There is something wicked lurking behind each and every ornamentation. Here, evil seems to have no problem refurbishing this place for its own needs, which is reserved for holy powers in the daytime. This duality suggests the duality of the universe itself and also that of man. Both the world and the human soul turn into a battlefield of morality and the struggle is projected into the cosmic theatre of the cathedral. In this vertical stage made of stone and glass, lights and shadows act out the conflict as incorporeal actors, in parallel with the real events taking place in the world and the plot of the novel.

2.1 Architecture as the Model of the Soul

The legend of the bleeding nun suggests an obvious duality. The spirit is known to be either giving prayers or cursing blasphemies while she haunts the halls. She used to be a sister, a respected member of a religious organisation, and now she is possessed by the devil, which obviously mirrors the cathedral. Ambrosio is the other person, who can be brought up as an example. In many ways, he is the cathedral himself, and its duality with the shadows and light is the duality of his soul. As a monk, he is extremely devoted to his religion, that is both his profession and private life, and the sacrifice he makes, which is giving up all the earthly pleasures, serves to eradicate any sinful intentions in him. That is the way of the ascetic. He lived his life in total seclusion, never, or only rarely leaving the Abbey. He is the practitioner of exceptional willpower and suppression that is needed to shape a man into a figurehead of his religion, both metaphorically and literally speaking, for he is very much like a statue. He is described as a man with lofty figures; tall and slim. Except his skin colour, which is rather brownish, he has all the commanding elegance and serenity of those carved out of marble. He stands starkly as an example of piety, giving the sermon to the visitors; like if he was part of the building himself, one among the many ornaments that treasure its halls.

2.2 Statues

Among the many prevalent ornamentation, the statues hold special importance. These figures made of marble, stone and wood are referenced so many times in the novel that they seem to have a little community of their own. All of them are religious and are mostly
based on saints such as St. Francis, St. Mark and St. Clare. Some statues decorate the cathedral, others occupy caverns and homes of the characters. These silent spectators are all over the place, and being recurring motifs, they are constant reminders of different impressions. But what do these objects represent? For being saints, some of them are worshipped. Prayers are addressed to them by such the nuns of the abbey. The colossal statue of St. Francis is used to hide the letters for the correspondence of Agnes and Raymond. Besides that, there is a tiny statue of St. Rosalia in the house of Antonia, used probably in the manner of a personal shrine. It is also in the scene in which Ambrosio attempts to rape the woman. There is also one in the scene in which Ambrosio signs a magical contract with Lucifer.

With all these hidden acts and sinful deeds that unfold before these chiselled saints, they really are holders of secrets. They almost seem to be strategically placed to be present for the most important events in the novel, and to have a perfect line of sight towards everything, like if they were security cameras.

A single Lamp, burning before the Statue of St. Rosolia, shed a faint light through the room, and permitted him to examine all the charms of the lovely Object [Antonia] before him. (pg. 137)

The statues see everything and there is no escape from them. They look into the soul, like if they are all-seeing eyes or messengers of God. However, it is not only God which the statues stand for, but also his self-designated ambassadors, the Catholic Church. So it is not only God, whose presence is constantly reminded, but also that of Catholicism. The institution is God himself, and there is no escape from it either. The worship of saints, which can be seen among many characters, is one of the Catholic practices that were attacked by their opponents. The veneration of them was heavily criticised for being idolatry, for they were often treated in the manner of minor gods, like if the old traditions of paganism were hidden behind the mask of a strictly monotheistic practice. In that sense, the presence of the statues, and all the sinister deeds that surround them are also reminders of the pagan decadence that resurfaced among the people of Madrid. The life of the Spanish city, which, for the contemporary Englishmen may stand as an example of excess, is supervised by its pagan idols to be damned forever.
2.2.1 Women as Statues

However, statues do not come only in their marble, stone and wooden form, as there are those which are made of flesh and blood. Especially the women are likened to statues, possessing both the ethereal beauty and their static nature which are required from them by society.

While the Cavalier says all sorts of civil things to you, you [Antonia] sit like a Statue, and never utter a syllable of thanks, either bad, good, or indifferent! (pg. 10)

He considered [Virginia] only as a fine Statue: She obtained from him no tribute save cold admiration, and when she had passed him, He thought of her no more. (pg. 157)

In these examples, both Antonia and Virginia are likened to statues. As discussed previously, the novel doesn't provide them opportunities to be active participants and actually change the events. Antonia, and Virginia are all passive characters seemingly made out of precious marble, as the lack of activity they have is more than made up by their lovely appearance. When the latter of the girls is married to one of the male protagonists at the end, she is confined in her marriage to be set up as nothing but a living house ornament for her husband, and this is dealt with as being the normal code of conduct by society. However, there is a scene which represents an entirely different kind of statue.

Still less did [Ambrosio] perceive that his heart throbbed with desire, while his hand was pressed gently by Matilda's ivory fingers. (pg. 32)

Matilda is described as having ivory fingers. The other instance this word is used in the novel is about Antonia in her infamous attempted rape scene.

[Antonia] lay with her cheek reclining upon one ivory arm; The Other rested on the side of the Bed with graceful indolence. A few tresses of her hair had escaped from beneath the Muslin which confined the rest, and fell carelessly over her bosom, as it heaved with slow and regular suspiration. (pg. 137)
Compared to marble, ivory is a more exotic material for statues that was obtained mostly via West-African and West-Indian colonial trade in the 18th century (Feinberg, Johnson 1). It is a quite fitting material to compare Matilda with, because her flesh, which is the very centre of her seductive being, is “imported” from another world. Compared to the two other “female statues”, that are Antonia and Virginia, she is, without a question, a more exotic one. However, a statue is not supposed to move, for its only duty is to evoke delight among the ranks of onlookers and to stand as an object of beauty. Matilda is different, because she makes her own decisions and acts. If she is still a statue, which is not supposed to behave like that, she is one that is animated by witchcraft, and is a sure sign of evil, for a smartly acting woman must be also a vicious one. She is not like Antonia, whose “ivoriness” seem to be out of place if I follow the analogy that was set up. The pose that is captured in her description is rather dynamic and asymmetric compared to the two previous ones (with her and Virginia), with one hand resting on the bed while the other holding the face. Despite her helplessness, this pose conveys a sense of dramatic activity that is not her nature, but Matilda's, and Antonia being likened to ivory implies some kind of connection that was made between the two women. It is very likely that in this particular instance, Antonia represents Matilda for the friar. Her rape can be seen as a symbolic attempt to gain dominance over the woman (Matilda) who invaded his life and condemned him to eternal damnation. It is a way to express the inexpressible, the desire to avenge the curse Matilda brought to him, and regain the control over his life that was never really granted in the first place. This kind of symbolic thinking is more apparent among people than it first seems to be, especially in archaic societies. For example, in 18th century France, it was a long practice of commoners to held carnivals in which they tortured and killed cats (Darnton 97-100). In these cruel rituals, cats symbolised despised figures of power in society, such as priests, guild masters and noblemen, who the common people wanted to get rid of. The commoners' abusive dominance over the helpless animals represented an opportunity to express their repressed feelings towards authority. It is entirely possible that Ambrosio was motivated for a similar reason and Antonia was his "cat" in a sense.

Happy Man, who is destined to possess the heart of [Antonia]! What delicacy in her features! What elegance in her form! How enchanting was the timid innocence of her eyes, and how different from the wanton expression, the wild luxurious fire which sparkles in Matilda's! (pg. 112)
This internal monologue of the friar supports the previous assumptions. He was disgusted with the authority of his temptress, and he wanted to possess someone, instead of being possessed in order to regain his lost control, even if it is only temporary and symbolic. I will discuss further his loss of power in the next chapter.
3. The Villains

3.1 Ambrosio, the Fallen Friar

One cannot leave behind symbolic thinking when reading a Gothic novel. One of the system of symbols that inspired me in the analysis are mythological archetypes, which were pioneered by Jung. The basic concept of archetypes is that they are recurring motifs in storytelling that can be found all over the world, even in cultures that are completely isolated from each other. They can be interpreted as the basic building block of plot and characterisation. When Jung's theories became prevalent, the practice could be adopted in literature analysis, and for lot of people, his system of archetypes really became the skeleton on which narration is built upon. On the other hand, he can be regarded as unscientific; a practitioner of his own decadent shamanism; a man stuck in the modern world longing for a sacred past, just like a "savage" Romantic. For example, he tends to rely overly on metaphors, and reasons with them like if they were real ties between the entities of the world (McGowan 78). Personally, I take the middle ground in the argument. While Jung is not entirely correct and scientific in psychology, there is some basis of truth in what he states, as there clearly are recurring themes and elements in literature and mythology all over the world.

In the analysis I did a little bit of experiment. For the role of women in the story, I considered an old storytelling tradition. According to that, men are dynamic; they are beings of action. They bring change and movement to the story. Women, on the other hand, are static; they are to preserve and nurture. This goes back to such ancient archetypes as Mother Earth and Father Sky. Earth is static; she is the womb of life, the provider of growth; Sky is all about shifty winds, rain, storms, lightning and thunder; he is the destroyer and shaper of the world. In short, men are actors, women are to be acted upon. It is also interesting to note that when women act for some exceptional reason, it is either foolish, wicked or both.

The first part of the story, when Don Lorenzo and Don Christoval go to the cathedral, show more or less traditional gender roles, in which women have these passive, but respected positions; almost medieval in a way. Chivalry is shown by the two cavaliers. Antonia is introduced as an angelic, innocent and delicate little creature who needs to be protected, as she is quite naive about life according to her aunt. However, it is quite
interesting that her looks are described as haunting and bewitching, which quite sets the
gothic tone of the novel. If we disregard her blonde hair, she is the typical Gothic woman.

Then we meet Ambrosio, the abbot, who is the head of the monastery. He is the main
villain, and a quite controversial character analysed by several critics of the Gothic. There
is an argument about the upbringing of the priest being rather feminine from the beginning,
because he lived a sheltered existence (Blakemore 2-3). According to this point of view,
inside the confined halls of the monastery, he was protected from the sins of the world, like
if he was a woman, to keep his innocence. Passivity and indecisiveness seen as a result of
this background. However, I have to disagree with this point of view, for my first
impression of Ambrosio in the novel is quite the opposite. To me, he starts clearly as a
figure of power; someone who represents a very traditionally masculine imagery. In the
following examples, some descriptions can be read of him which should support my point.

[Ambrosio’s] voice at once distinct and deep was fraught with all the terrors of the
Tempest, while He inveighed against the vices of humanity, and described the
punishments reserved for them in a future state. Every Hearer looked back upon his
past offences, and trembled: The Thunder seemed to roll... (pg. 11)

His words sounded like thunder to her ears: ‘ (pg. 25)

As He thundered out these words, He violently grasped Antonia's arm, and spurned
the earth with delirious fury. (pg. 173)

In bold stands an important motif that is connected to him; the thunder, which makes it a
rather surprising fact that I first thought about the aforementioned archetypes. Even if it is
nothing more than a random coincidence, his character is quite fitting as the incarnation of
the sky god; he is a man of high status and respect who has the power of terror under his
command, which is his thundery voice. He is like a Zeus or a Thor in a sense that he is
someone both admirable and frightening. His words carry a lot of weight and he certainly
has the magnetism to influence people. He is also quick to make judgements and order
punishments to the members of his monastery (i. e. In the case of Agnes), or just simply
intimidate his audience during sermons. He is a quite convincing and reasonable authority
figure and it is the exact opposite of the traditional feminine nature that Blakemore tries to
convey. The passivity, which the aforementioned critic argued about, is more like a strong tendency of introversion in my eyes, combined with stoicism and devotion to the discipline Ambrosio has sworn allegiance to. After all, he is a well-read scholar, who is seen as the best at his field and who studied rigorously for many years. These traits, again, are quite far from the feminine values of the past, for a woman was never required, or even allowed to be that much devoted to anything but her children and household chores. An inwardly oriented, highly intense and focused woman, who was so much interested in intellectual fields that she was willing to give up everything in her life, like a monk, was simply out of the question in a traditional, patriarchal society. After all, being focused is a highly active process which requires lots of willpower. Activity itself contradicts the obligations and roles society designated for women of the past. To conclude, I believe that what Blakemore perceive as passivity, is simply intellectualism and a religious detachment from the world.

The abbot's femininity, which she argues about, is a later trait he picks up during his relationship with Matilda. The roles will be reversed, with Ambrosio taking up many passive characteristics. For example, he is the one who is acted upon as she literary directs the thunder he represents, as it can be seen here.

'Beware of what you do!' interrupted Matilda; 'Your [Ambrosio's] sudden change of sentiment may naturally create surprize, and may give birth to suspicions which it is most our interest to avoid. Rather, redouble your outward austerity, and thunder out menaces against the errors of others, the better to conceal your own. (pg. 107)

The thunder symbolises the power and dominance he formerly had. But here, it is in direct control of Matilda, unlike in the previous quotations. She is, surprisingly, the character who makes the most conscious decisions and is willing to actively carry them out; quite an unusual role for a woman in that time. But as I mentioned, it is represented as something wicked and unnatural, as she does it for evil, satanic deeds. Under her charms, Ambrosio becomes an executor of satanic will. In the scene where he sneaks in to Antonia to rape her, he charms her with a magic object which prevents her from waking up.

He breathed thrice upon the silver Myrtle, pronounced over it Antonia's name, and laid it upon her pillow. The effects which it had already produced permitted not his doubting its success in prolonging the slumbers of his devoted Mistress (pg. 137)
He remained for some moments devouring those charms with his eyes which soon were to be subjected to his ill-regulated passions. (pg. 137)

Suddenly, he becomes something like an incubus; a mythical creature who rapes women in their sleep. By this time, he is completely under the control of Matilda. The only trace of decisiveness and activity left in his personality, in a wicked and deformed form, is the sexual power he could never have in his life. Now was granted by magic. It can be interpreted in a way that he traded his formal authority for pure, raw sexual dominance, or in other words, the mind for the flesh. The sky god in him moved from his intellect and now inhabits the body, to carry out other, much more sinister aspects of the archetype. After all, Zeus was well known for his sexual conquests and that he played the role of the incubus by raping women who were magically enchanted as well. However, he had the willpower to regulate his often pardoned dark side, and conquer himself as well as the world around him. Ambrosio, however, is a different case. In the beginning, he had the willpower, but he was completely alienated from his sexuality. By the middle and through the end, he gained the means to express his lust, but becomes docile and feeble minded in matters that require great decision. However, the sky god's combination of superior intellect and unrestrainable desires is what the cause turmoil and the driving force behind the narrative world of mythology. Ambrosio, having only one of the aspects, is just a half-Zeus. He must rely on Matilda, who takes over his intellectual side, which he neglects while he is terrorizing the women of Madrid.

Speaking of terror, another, rather similar scene is needed to be investigated, in which Raymond was visited at night by the bleeding nun herself. In this case, he was awaken, but his body was completely paralysed.

I gazed upon the Spectre with horror too great to be described. **My blood was frozen in my veins.** I would have called for aid, but the sound expired ere it could pass my lips. My nerves were **bound up in impotence**, and I remained in the same attitude **inanimate as a Statue** (pg. 183)

Raymond! Raymond! Thou art mine!

With her invasive message, that can be seen as a marriage proposal, a symmetry is created with the Ambrosio-scene. For the modern reader, both of these encounters resemble
the terror of sleep paralysis (French); a condition, in which one’s body can’t be moved, and hallucinations, which are often supernatural in nature, occur. The overwhelming feeling of helplessness and defenceless is what characterises this rare condition of the nervous system and has been the basis of evil fairies, spirits and demons in folklore. However, the irony is that Ambrosio is just as paralysed as his victim, for he is being controlled by other agents more powerful than him.

[Ambrosio's] limbs trembled, while He obeyed her. (pg. 127)

A cold shivering seized [Ambrosio's} body, and He sank upon one knee, unable to support himself. (pg. 127)

These quotations are from a scene prior to Antonia's rape, in which the monk makes the pact with the devil in the company of Matilda. His bodily sensations mirror that of Antonia, placing him in the role of both victim and perpetrator, which is another one on the long list of dualities to be found through the novel.

Ambrosio's divine nature was already discussed. His name also confirms that, as ambrosia is the food of gods in Greek mythology, which grants immortality for those who eat from it. It is a telling name that can be interpreted in several ways. First of all, he can be seen as a gift from God; a divine being who, as a preacher, can grant the grace of God for others. In a symbolic way, his wisdom is consumed by his audience and grant them immortality in heaven, if they listen to him and live by his words. Teachings, after all, are often described as spiritual food in the Bible and similar motifs of food, for example, the body of Christ as bread, run through the religious scriptures. The extent of devotion Ambrosio has towards his religion completely consumes his being and he views it as a great sacrifice. After all, he must give up on such earthly joys as romantic love and pleasure, which are automatically granted for an everyday, normal human being, a casual sinner, if it is in the context of marriage. But Ambrosio is different, for he must stand as the figurehead of his religion. It is a much stricter moral code that he must abide to as a monk, for he is an instrument of the Church, and instruments never fail. Even though he is in the position of authority, he is led by standards he must conform to.

From another viewpoint, his name implies that his being is consumed by others that are more sinister than the heavenly ones. He is bitten by a serpens, an animal that is symbol of sin. In this example, the use of language is interesting. There are two words for the same
reptile in English, which are snake and serpent. The former is of Germanic origin, and has been the common name of the animal since Old English. The latter comes from serpents, a Latin word and is used more often in a mystical and religious context. The deliberate use of the second name is a very blatant reference to religious symbolism. This blatancy, however, may be intentional characterisation, to show that Ambrosio never forgets his religious duties and that he is, after all, a superstitious Catholic man (as he is the one who calls the animal serpent). The bite suggests that sin itself wants to feed on him and sin, in fact, is not the only one. Matilda sucks out the poison from the wound to save him. These are two instances in which he was almost literally eaten. Apparently, his soul is quite a popular delicacy, as both God and Lucifer wants it to be his own, not to mention Matilda, who seem to have power over the devil himself. It is ironic that a man of power and authority soon turns out to be a passive plaything of different forces and interest upon which he has no control at all. Food, however divine may it be, is destined to be a passive entity. In the last part of the novel, he is fought over by the powers of God and Lucifer, the latter being the winner of this struggle, earning Ambrosio a death worthy of Prometheus, for he is thrown into the abyss from a rock and his flesh is torn by eagles. Lucifer consumed him completely, which fulfills the destiny his name implies.

3.1.1 Ambrosio as Faust

There are obvious parallels between the novel and the legend of Faust, with Ambrosio acting out the downfall of the German alchemist. Both men are extremely immersed in their profession, which eventually lead to their end. What fuels this extreme devotion is knowledge in the case of Faust and piety in the case of the friar. In both Goethe's Faust, and Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, the protagonist's soul is the place of a final battle between good and evil and it is also the situation in The Monk. However, Ambrosio's fate is clearly, and decidedly to be damned forever, while Faust has the chance for salvation and goes straight into heaven in many versions and adaptations of the legend, even in Goethe's own (but not Marlowe's). Both Ambrosio and Faust make a deal with the devil through an agent, who serves as their advisor to achieve their desires and manipulate them in the process, so that their soul can be corrupted. Faust has Mephistopheles and Ambrosio has Matilda as this agent, but the methods they imply target completely different aspects of their victims' personality. Mephistopheles exploits the alchemist's intellectual side by
offering him power which can allow him to surpass the limits of human nature. His tool is his wits and clever reasoning, which both appeal to the scientific mind of Faust. Matilda, on the other hand, uses plain old seduction coupled with sorcery to evoke the desires that have been suppressed in the monk for such a long time. It is not carnal human nature which burdens consciousness by imposing the limits of materiality on it, like in the case of Faust, but the exact opposite. Ambrosio's whole being, both flesh and mind, is completely enslaved to a consciousness that subordinates everything to the ideals of religious piety and asceticism. In Freudian terms, Matilda exploits the Id, while Mephistopheles appeals to the Superego, which stand as two extreme components of the psyche. What is common though in Matilda and Mephistopheles is that they know how to pull the strings. These two devilish agents have a keen on finding the weak side of their victims and exploiting it for their own needs.

The two, who are being controlled, have their own differences. Faust has the redeeming qualities to stay a likeable character who can be easily identified with. This is not entirely the case in The Monk. Ambrosio starts as a stark and grim man; an excellent "villain material" even in the beginning, and his death is not mourned more than the slain of a ravaging beast. He menacingly appears and next, he is unleashed, like some force of nature that brings destruction and pain, that is even suggested by his thundery voice, and expires just as quickly. He is a storm, a lunatic sky god that has acted out his fury and is gone forever to leave behind the change he ruthlessly carved in the world. Still, there are some particular cases in which Ambrosio shows his softer side. When he meets Rosario in the Abbey, who is Matilda in disguise, he leaves behind the persona of the strict monk, and behaves like a compassionate human being, who is sensitive to the feelings of others. Rosario pours his heart to the monk and shares his pain to explain his misanthropy and tell the unfortunate fate of his sister (who is actually Matilda). Through this, he can find reconciliation through the sympathy of Ambrosio. By this point in the novel, the two sides of the man are clearly reflected. One is the grim preacher with the thundery voice, who is eager to punish strictly without regret, and the other is the compassionate friend, who can understand the problems of someone and who can be trusted. His ruthless nature may be a strictly professional mask which he uses to hide his sensitive side, but it is also possible that his compassion is another signal of his power. After all, those men who are dominant can afford to show some sensitivity to paint the image of the kind and understanding (but nevertheless strong) father figure. Even dictators such as Hitler and Stalin were known to employ this strategy in which they were photographed or painted with a wise smile on their
face (the one that seems to penetrate the soul) in the company of children. Actually, this unity of sensitivity and ruthlessness, two conflicting sides meld into one being, is very much like that of a god. A divine being has to utilise both aspects, as he or she must represent the duality of the natural world. And maybe the fall of Ambrosio is a consequence of him tempting God by trying to imitate him, which adds more to the Faustian quality of the character. If we also add the hidden side of him, the unrestrained beast, who is awakened by the charms of Matilda, we get a character with three conflicting sides that cannot be put together in one piece.

What is responsible for the transformation of the monk in the first place? There are signals which indicate his fate from the early part of the novel, which are worth investigating. First of all, even though he is a monk, who is supposed to live in seclusion and sacrifice his life for his studies, he is depicted as a quite attractive man. It is not usual for a monk, who is supposed to abstain from the world. For example, the partial shaving of the head is to intentionally deprive the facial features of any earthly excess, but Ambrosio's hair is intact. He is simply not that kind of man to do that. On the contrary, he is this excess personified, for he is handsome enough for women to find him attractive, and as a source of temptation, he is also in danger of being tempted. He is also lusting after a painting of the Virgin Mary (who is based on Matilda), which can be interpreted as another sign of his divine ambitions. After all, the conception of Jesus Christ can be easily seen in the Bible as a kind of Holy Communion between God and Mary. By having a sexual desire towards that Mary figure on the painting, he becomes a symbolic rival of God. This symbolic connection is strengthened when he finally has the opportunity to make love to the woman on whom Mary was based, and after that everything changes. He becomes Matilda's tool, whose other mean of manipulation is her apparent innocence and weakness. Ambrosio never assumes in the beginning of the novel that there may be more behind her love for him. After all, his flawless sense of motives that he trained in rigorous study in order to see clearly into human nature is not prone to error, for he is a superior being, or at least he believes that way.
3.2 Matilda, the Seductress

The name Matilda can be traced back to actual Gothic origins, which means that both literally and figuratively speaking she is a Gothic woman and the embodiment of the haunted spirit the genre represents. Among such names as Ambrosio, Lorenzo and Baptiste, Matilda is out of place with its distinctive and almost pagan Germanic quality (it can mean brave in war, or battle maiden). It was well known that Lewis was interested in German culture, for he spent many years in Germany (Blakemore 10). It would be a reasonable assumption that he deliberately chose this name because of these associations. Matilda is definitely an outsider. As a Faustian agent, she is partially supernatural, which puts her character among the ranks of those, who have some kind of duality in them. She is made of conflicting and contrasting sides. One is her human side, which provide some occurrences to show she is not as wicked and manipulative as she later becomes. She shows, for example, genuine feelings towards Ambrosio. Her plotting and disguise which was used to get close to him was seem at the beginning of the novel as simply a reason of all-consuming love. In one instance, she bursts into tears when he turns out to lust after other women. Afterwards there is an unexpected shift in her behaviour. She begins to help the monk achieve his goals by initiating him into witchcraft, so that he can have the opportunity to live out his desires on other women. With this information in mind, it is possible that Lucifer's control over Matilda is limited, and that it is the strongest when she is emotionally compromised. It is like if the devil in her “kicks in” that moment of importance to mould her into a manipulative witch from the average woman, who was simply jealous. The significance of this transformation being caused by a highly emotional state is that the mind is portrayed as an entity that can be corrupted by strong feelings (especially by one that is considered to be a sin). It can be overwhelmed with emotions any moment, and that can evoke the darkest parts of the personality. Emotionality is sinister and unpredictable, and letting it free may be as dangerous as completely suppressing them. And because women are often represented as being more emotional, or just simply lacking the control over emotions, they were also regarded as more corruptible to evil forces (perhaps that is also behind the numerous cases of witch burning). One thing is certain. The Romantic thought that the mind and the world is controlled more by the irrational than the rational can be identified in The Monk quite easily. In Chapter 5, I will assess irrationalism in The Monk again, but in the context of Enlightenment and Romanticism.
4. Deformation of Body and Soul

4.1 The Torments of Women

A machine works tirelessly for the mind to sustain its integrity and to provide the necessary signals from the environment to fascinate itself. That machine is the body. Billions of its cells are toiling, force-breeding and dying without rest under the stark regime of the soul that may be no more than an electrified illusion of brain cells, a sort of fetishist neural idol for which everything is subordinated. It is no wonder we are upset, or even horrified when our own regiments of fleshy bits fail to carry out our orders and suddenly go on a strike. They can suffocate us by denying the precious nutrients that we so much long for, or simply assault our mental strongholds with pain through the nerves; the whips and leashes we use to keep them in control that are suddenly turned against us. Modern medical science suggests that the body is a dislocated mess of conflicting parts that are a wonder to even function together, and has enough possible abnormalities to fill many feverish nightmares. Gothic fiction often explores such monstrosities of the body.

The classic story in which the body is used as a source of horror is Frankenstein, and it is really the epitome of this motif. Similar themes, however, can be found in such an early Gothic novel as The Monk. If we consider the extent of suffering some characters go through, and how vividly it is portrayed, one may wonder about the possibility of the book written simply to serve as a sadist's hidden refuge and a vehicle to live out such fantasies. Murder, rape, starving and poisoning are all portrayed in the novel, and its victims are usually women, who don't have the means to stand up for themselves. They are completely incapacitated, and often behave like victims with learned helplessness. While others act – often against them – they react, or more accurately, fear and despair reacts in them, for these characters are no more than raw emotions filled in delicate bodies. They are not unusual at all to the modern reader, as horror film victims provide the same kind of spectacle for the audience.

As I mentioned before, the entire genre of horror in the cinema comes from the Gothic. Suffering, for some reason, is fascinating to everyone and there is a great demand for its portrayal. It is especially the case if the target of suffering is a woman, for there is something inherently wrong and fascinating in seeing a woman deformed by pain. Perhaps it is due to the cultural taboo of hurting women.
4.2 Agnes

The story of Agnes is a particularly dreadful one. She was already in love, when she became a nun, and her pregnancy was something to be expected. Then, she was severely punished for her sin and was thrown into a dungeon, where she was starved and left to die, and gave birth to a baby which expired soon. In a way, this is foreshadowed when she disguised herself as the bleeding nun to escape with Raymond. She identified herself with the ghost unintentionally, and all that suffering of hers was simply a reward for tempting fate, which, considering the superstitious world in which the characters lived is a plausible cause of her hardships. But is there a reason for her suffering in the story? Her torment seem to be for its own sake.

Her name may tell something about that. First of all, Agnes means holy and pure, and it sets clear requirements for its bearer. Therefore, a real Agnes is supposed to stand for the aforementioned ideal of femininity, which shouldn't be desecrated. As a pregnant nun, her purity (in a Christian sense) is ironic and it shows that despite what she strives for, she still have her own flaws. Another interpretation of the name is being a reference to Agnes of Rome, a legendary martyr of the Catholic Church. The name is also similar in sounding to agnus, the Latin word for lamb, which suggests that she is destined to be the sacrificial animal of the story, who is ought to suffer for the simple reason of being born to suffer.

According to the ancient archetype, men act, and women are acted upon. Except for Matilda, the women characters in this novel are more or less weak. They are unable to control their fate and they have as much control over their lives as specks of dust in the wind. The only viable action they can take, when danger threatens them, is to flee, as they are unable to confront their tormentors. Even their escape attempts are deemed to failure. When Agnes dressed as the bleeding nun, Raymond mistook the real ghost with her. Antonia's own attempt to elope from Ambrosio after he raped her was even more unfortunate, for she died.

But even though they fail as active participants and shapers of events, after all it is the events which shape them, their endurance is exceptional, and is a sign of great integrity. In the dungeon, Agnes was drugged and gave birth to a baby completely alone, which soon died, and there was no one to comfort her. Her torments were so improbable and extreme that they almost reach the borders of ridicule. Anybody would have easily driven mad in a similar situation, but she managed to keep her integrity. Women, after all, were seen as
pure beings who were supposed to endure all hardships in life for their reward, either a worldly or a heavenly one. Her reward was marriage with Raymond. As a matter of fact, her suffering can be seen as a rite of passage and a transition to adulthood. She was young and foolish for trying to take control over her life, and the tragedy of her baby was a harsh lesson from fate she had to pay.

This representation may be also due to the fact that there were many old superstitions regarding mental disorders in the past. Insanity was only rarely seen as a disease of the mind; in fact, it was more likely to be considered a moral deficiency and a corruptibility of the person. Agnes is supposed to be a good character through the novel. There are cases in which her actions are questionable, for example, when she lets her anger control her and curses Ambrosio, but overall, she is a virtuous woman who is just put into horrific situations. For her purity is inherent and shines through her personality, she is not supposed to be maddened. She is like a sturdy little box, which can be tossed and kicked around and even stricken by hammers, but it protects everything precious inside. She encloses and preserves the ideals of purity in the same way ("Her character was gay, open and good-humoured" pg. 64), as a living female archetype of nurturing, just like the Earth itself, no matter how much the storms rage over its fields.

However, there is also a peculiar way in which her story is told. What happened with her in the dungeon is described by Agnes herself, and not by third person narration that alienates the reader from the characters in many cases. In fact, the role of first person narration is often to bring them closer and to evoke what they feel. When we are reading what is narrated by a character, we are inside her mind; our senses and thoughts are directly connected to hers. This is the easiest and shortest way to force empathy on us and its directness and invasive subjectivity can be extremely effective. However, the manner in which Agnes recites her story is not so different from that of the original third person narrator: ruthlessly objective and verbose. The way she catalogues her feelings and actions that are driven by despair and insanity is not that of a tortured women, but that of a writer. Even though it is usual for novels of the period to provide complex dialogues in which characters are like gods of rhetoric for their flawless diction, her story still feels unnatural. It is an almost surreal experience to see how she alienates herself through perfect narration that is only grammatically first person.

In The Monk, however, Agnes has an integral part. After all, she and Raymond are the main couple who are fortunate enough to get married by the end and, brought together by the torment they were driven by. For she endured virtuously with her soul intact, like the
embodiment of purity, she was rewarded with a marriage, the fulfilment of her identity as a woman.
5. Disguise, Contradictions and Catholic Deception

The novel is full of occurrences in which appearance is misleading. Matilda, an agent of Lucifer, disguises herself as a monk; Agnes disguises herself as the bleeding nun to help her escape; Theodore dresses as a beggar and Ambrosio, after his transformation, manipulates people around him to get closer to women he lusts for, hiding his true nature behind the mask of his former self. Nothing is what it seems in this story.

5.1 Ambrosio's Internal and External Masks

Ambrosio is the embodiment of the corrupt priest, who suffers from hubris. But his role is more than that. It is notable that when he realises that Rosario is a woman, he still tries to treat her (or him) as a male friend, like if nothing happened. He accepts his self-inflicted illusion to go on with his life like if nothing happened. This a portrayal of a man who is very much used to hypocrisy and is able to suspend his sense of right and wrong if needed. Indeed, later in the novel, when his vices increase in severity, this mind-set becomes prevalent.

It may be a comment on Catholicism and England's opposition of it. Clerical members of the Catholic church have to reconcile sooner or later all the paradoxes of the institution that fails to provide a required religious integrity. From my personal affiliations, I know that many priests go through periods in their life in which they completely lose their faith in the church they belong to and actually feel enraged about its conducts, which they find questionable. Sooner or later they learn how to ease their feelings and regain their trust, but these times recur sooner or later. The stark division between the methods of the Church and basic Christian teachings couldn't be denied by English Protestants. Most often, the only way of a Catholic priest to reconcile his feelings was to desensitise himself of hypocrisy and lies, and ignore the paradoxes. It can be assumed that Ambrosio is used to that. Furthermore, his upbringing, which was strictly religious from the beginning, may made him hard to accept real life, and the facts that the organisation he belongs to is primarily concerned of power and control.

Moreover, the novel actually states that he was the wrong man for the position. He was described as having a warrior's heart, with all the talents that could have easily make him prosper in a military career.
He had a Warrior's heart, and He might have shone with splendour at the head of an Army. There was no want of generosity in his nature: The Wretched never failed to find in him a compassionate Auditor (pg. 110)

A man, who is inherently a type to strive and prosper in an earthly way, was forced to give up his natural drive and to cast his eyes forever unto the heavens, and ironically, he was excluded of that place in the end. He was like a caged animal driven mad by captivity, and even though he was the victim of circumstances, he couldn't be saved, as his actions were so sinful. But what is the real reason behind the fall of Ambrosio? If he was just the wrong man in the wrong place, why did he meet his tragic end?

First of all, he knows himself to be doing evil deeds and sinning, but he doesn't really take actions against it. He acquired a kind of learned helplessness in the same manner as the typical victimised woman, and also an impression of fatalism that he can't change his inevitable corruption, the way he can't change the corruption of the Church he belongs to. He follows Matilda without regret in the cavern to witness her incantations. He knows evil, which lurks in there and which was planned to be awaken, and even considers God’s help one moment, but, in the manner of Marlowe's Faustus, he denies it, believing that his soul is beyond any possible help that can redeem it. The cavern, as a subconscious of the world that mirrors that of Ambrosio, contains the typical Gothic imagery of skulls and the symbolic play of lights and shadows which also mirror the internal conflict of the monk. A lamp is the only source of light, which illuminates a statue of St. Clare. It is being taken away by Matilda to begin the rituals and Ambrosio is left in complete darkness. His deprivation of light is symbolic, and indicates that the silent battle for his soul, which was mentioned on the previous pages, seems to end in the favour of the devil. In this moment of despair, the monk tries to rationalise his actions. He says that he uses the help of Matilda, and not that of the devil, therefore it is not really an evil deed. He also adds to his thoughts that he can repent later any time he wants, as God forgives, therefore, shifting to a completely opposite belief than the original, which was his soul being unsaveable. In other words, he postpones his redemption until it is too late.

This justification can also be a criticism of the Catholic Church. After all, it suggests that priests, who are “in charge of salvation” are provided the luxury to confess each other, or maybe even themselves any time, therefore, they are able to free themselves completely from morality if they want to. But the recurring thing that characterises the monk's behaviour is his unwillingness to do anything about his situation, letting his animalistic
side take control that is in the hands of Matilda. It is a form of passivity on his behalf, and it may be the most important reason for his downfall. He allows evil to set foot, both outside and inside his soul and waits, like if he is waiting for someone to help. Men are not supposed to behave that way, but women, who act as damsels in distress with eternal patience do. Therefore, it is the violation of gender roles that leads to his end, which sets up a parallel between him and Agnes. Both of their punishments comes from this “crime”, which is inaction in the case of the former and action in the case of the latter, but the reasons are the same. After all, everyone is supposed to get what he or she deserves.

5.2 Protestant Novel in Catholic Packaging

However, there is a problem which comes into mind with the anti-Catholic analysis of the novel. In the preface, Lewis neither disapproves nor acknowledges the existence of the Bleeding Nun, the German legend the novel is based on (pg. 5). This ambiguity leaves the reader with the impression that she may be real. Interestingly, almost nothing can be found about this legend outside the book, and the few sources that mention it are all connected to The Monk. This may suggests that Lewis made it up for his novel. However, there was a French myth in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century that bears a resemblance to the legend of the Bleeding Nun. It is based on a real historical witch trial that was held in 1634 in the city of Loudun (Mastin). In the trial, nuns were reported to be possessed by demons, just like the aforementioned sister of the book. There was even a Catholic priest in this case, called Urbain Grandie, who was described as a good-looking man, quite attractive to the women around him. He was found to be guilty on the charges of sorcery. The myths, naturally, exaggerate the historical facts. In one version, the priest appears in the dreams of the possessed nuns and entices them to give into their sexuality. The similarity between Grandie and Ambrosio is striking, with the Antonia-rape scene coming to mind. Furthermore, both the real and the fictional priest were condemned and tortured by the Church (it was the inquisition which put Ambrosio to trial). Gruesome death is also given to both of them afterwards, with Grandie being burned at stake, and Ambrosio being torn to pieces.

Another interesting fact is, that despite the outrageousness of this French legend that might have represented the Catholic Church as cursed from the inside, it was intentionally spread by the its members as propaganda. The results were more than intriguing. Public exorcisms became a main attraction in the French city for many years afterwards, and a
high number of Protestants converted themselves to Catholicism. The reason behind this is that they might have perceived the events as a successful administration of justice by the Church, showing its efficiency, especially against the supernatural. Good prevails over evil; order conquers chaos and people like that.

The same happens in The Monk. Despite the fact that Ambrosio, a Catholic man, committed all kinds of serious crimes, he was trialled, condemned and was planned to be executed by the Church, showing that it is capable of cleansing itself and cutting the occasional tumour out of its own body. The point is that the novel operates with the same devices as Catholic legends such as the Loudun-possessions. It plays with myths, demons, possessions and evil spirits and it represents all these elements as real in the plot. Retribution is served; the Church prevails, and marries those who are worthy at the end, showing that it can both destroy and create sacred bonds at the same time. The Monk might have been a purely Catholic novel, if the narrator wouldn't have provided a commentary on Ambrosio and his mind's inner workings, which has already been covered in the thesis. Lewis constantly reminds the readers about the unnatural suppression of his instinct he had to endure. Overall, he reveals in his pages a crippled man, whose life was taken away by a dubious institution. Also, his fall was a cascade of events started by his worship of the Virgin Mary-painting, which is well within the borders of idolatry. A Catholic narrative wouldn't include such plot elements. That means that even though there are some elements in the novel that may suggest a Catholic narrative, it is inherently Protestant in its message.

The question which comes into mind is that why an anti-Catholic novel would use the supernatural devices of the Church? To provide an answer, an explanation needs to be made on the cultural and philosophical background of the 18th century. The first, and probably the most important movement of that era is Enlightenment. It is the age of science. The secularisation of literature started to gain its momentum (Nelson 3). New discoveries about the natural world following Isaac Newton's heritage made the universe a more clearly structured place, which was easier to understand. The old superstitions were started to be questioned. Naturally, Newtonian classical mechanics and Protestantism go hand in hand. Protestants wanted to find a straightforward and practical way to their God without excessive ceremonies, and what can be more straightforward than understanding the universe he created? The Catholic Church is not in line with the new trends and it hinders the perception of the world, for its superstitions restricts science.

Protestants argued that this kind of mysticism is exploited by the clergy to manipulate believers and keep them in line to gain power. In the mind of a Protestant, if God really is a
benevolent being, he must create a straightforward, "user-friendly" world that is easy to understand. It is designed to be an ideal habitat for human beings, and a relatively fine and laid-back place to live. In this world, wicked and chaotic forces, which are lurking in the shadows to prey on weak minds, are kept at a minimum level. This is because the protestant cosmology tolerates an abstract and geometric explanation of the world that science gives.

But the human mind doesn't work that way. For some reason, human beings are put together with a relentless thirst for mysticism; hopefully the type which doesn't present a real danger to its witnesses. A plain and featureless scientific world can't provide that kind of satisfaction, but the haunting atmosphere of Gothic definitely can. It was popular because people wanted mystery, whether cheap or sophisticated, and they were provided plenty with Romanticism, which was a backslash on the sterility of Enlightenment. Suddenly, after many centuries of scientific advancement, people were longing for the mysteries of an exotic past; a world of medieval knights and heroic adventures. There was even a certain longing for Catholic spirituality, and many artists wanted to revive the old reputation of the Church, or at least its aesthetics of splendour. The end of the 18th century was a transitional period between the two movements, and The Monk, being the child of both Enlightenment and Romanticism, seems to bear the marks of both. It has the critical mind-set about the Church, which thinking is based on the logical understanding of human psychology. It also has the stylistic and aesthetic devices of Catholic mysticism which mirror its morality as well, but never to the extent of becoming a full-fledged Catholic piece of literature. The novel may stand as a living example that human nature itself is often two sided. Its opposing forces are destined to share the same realm, even though they can't make a unified statement. And because it hinders perception and understanding, the world cannot be comprehended.
6. Conclusion

As a footprint of its era, The Monk provides insight into the social status of the late 18th century. With its controversial scenes and radical religious commentary, it is no wonder that Lewis's readership was outraged. Still, probably its scandalous reputation is what helped the novel attain its popularity and to spread its genre further. The gender roles it shows are both traditional and reversed. Ambrosio, who was a strong male character, loses his will to remain active shaper of his life; therefore loses his traditional masculinity. Matilda, with her scheming and manipulative behaviour is too active for a woman. Both characters' violation of old gender roles lead to their downfall.

The use of architecture is typical that of Gothic literature, for it contains heavy symbolism. The complexity of Gothic buildings that provide an environment for a dramatic play with light and shadows is a natural breeding ground of symbols of duality. In this case, the duality is the wicked darkness of the Catholic Church and its corruption. It is contrasted with the mask of luxury and splendour. Also, statues play an enormous role in the story, for they are not just background scenery, but more like actual living beings. They are the eyewitnesses of the violent events that happen over time and symbolise both the all-seeing eyes of God and the authority of the Church. Their worship is also emphasised, which is probably a way to criticise the idolatry of Catholicism. The fact that they are holders of dark secrets, like in the case when a letter was hidden in one of them, provides an additional suggestion about the corruption of the Church. Again, like in the case of the architecture, the appearance is contrasted with what they really are used for.

Women are also compared to statues for different reasons. For the victims, like Antonia, it is to further emphasise their passivity, purity and innocence. They were made to be objects, and ornaments of the household they are assigned to. In the case of Matilda, it is to suggest that she is an unnatural, animated being who surely is in the hands of the devil, for active participation on behalf of a woman was always dubious. She is probably the character who has the most mobility and flexibility, because she is often seen crossing boundaries of space, identity and she can quickly change her role when needed. She often moves between underground areas and surface terrains easily, which is the spatial manifestation of this ease of mobility. She can quickly disguise herself when needed and also change the very emotions she succumb to if it fits her roles. In one moment, she is in love, and in the other, she uses the object of her affections for her plans, like if she never
felt anything in the first place. These are all examples which show how her active role manifests itself in the story, which should serve as adequate evidence to support that activity among women wasn't seen as a positive trait.

The other character who was thoroughly examined, was Ambrosio. His internal struggle between both his carnal and the intellectual aspect and also that of his good and evil side is apparent. The very fact that his body was torn apart at the end of the novel symbolises that he failed to put his divided personality together, which resulted in his eternal damnation. In many ways, he can be seen as the personification of the Church, which is suggested to be dislocated with its huge contradiction between teachings and practice. Like Ambrosio, the institution started with an ambitious and virtuous mission to spread religion and to hold the highest possible standards in piety, but it became corrupted for its strict adherence to asceticism. Its contradictions are often as hard to put together and reconcile as the friar's own ones. His damnation is an English Protestant message of a possible fate of the Roman Catholic Church and its followers.

However, this stance can also be contrasted with the plot devices and narrative tools used by Lewis's, which rely on mysticism and superstitions to a great extent, that shows a new era longing for the exotic spirituality of the past. It derives heavily from Catholic devices in storytelling, and at the end, the given institution prevails over the evil and chaotic forces that threaten the lives of Madrid. Social order is preserved and everything becomes normal again as the heroes uncovers the secrets with the help of the Inquisition.

Perhaps an intriguing topic for further research essays could be based on such Catholic legends as the infamous Loudun possessions and investigating their influence on Lewis, for there can be many parallels found between the two. The most surprising fact, however, is that the reception of the legends drove a huge portion of the city's population to Catholicism, even though that story was as violent and scandalous as Lewis's novel. Was it because it was considered to be an authentic real life event? Was it because of the difference between the attitude of the people of 17thcentury France and late 18th century Britain? The reasons for that can be numerous, and they probably with another paper that is based primarily on historical research and theology, instead of literature criticism.

The mystical devices, which Lewis use, seem to support much more Catholic influence that was previously assessed among his critics. Whether it was intentional on his part or not, it reflects the stormy relationship between Britain and the Vatican and the fact that even though the Church of England was based on Protestant ideology, Catholicism still influenced it to a great extent.
I could probably go on and assess further questions and mysteries that can be derived from the results, for there are many that is provided by the subjectivity of literary interpretation, that can be either seen as a blessing and a curse in this discipline. One thing, however, can be sure. Matthew G. Lewis's The Monk is much more complex than it is assumed to be. The underlining symbols, concepts and social commentary can be extremely rich if special attention is directed at these aspect without the prejudice that is usually given to the Gothic and Lewis's person as a writer. As I said in the introduction, I do not wish to declare this novel to be either great literature, not so great or even plain kitsch. The only thing I am certain of is that its scandals and the sheer number of people who despised it shows that it was extremely popular. After all, it assessed uncomfortable tensions in society that not many writers dared to write about. Was it good, or bad? Who knows. It was influential, and perhaps it is enough to say.
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