

Université de Montréal

**Transgression in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* and the
Fragmentation of the Self**

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Résumé de synthèse

“Transgression in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* and the Fragmentation of the Self” est une examination des différentes étapes à travers lesquelles la conscience humaine évolue et les comportements que chaque étape génère. Cette étude porte une attention particulière aux mécanismes de conversion du bien en mal et les motifs qui nourrissent cette conversion. La thèse se concentre dans un premier temps sur la souillure spirituelle comme l’étape qui précède la manifestation concrète du mal. Elle explore dans un deuxième temps le parallèle entre la conscience de la vertu et la conscience de la méchanceté. Dans un troisième temps, elle examine le caractère indéfini et confus de l’identité des personnages de ce roman. Principalement, cette étude démontre que le système patriarcal oppressif ainsi que la joie du pouvoir de ces personnages sont les causes qui expliquent leurs caractères fragmentés. Pour ce fait, cette thèse explore les mécanismes du pouvoir en relation avec le discours, la connaissance et le corps.

Le premier chapitre porte sur le cheminement de la sainteté vers la malédiction. Il examine de près la croissance du mal dans la conscience d’Ambrosio en commençant par la souillure jusqu’à l’acte final du péché menant ainsi à sa destruction. Dans ce chapitre, j’analyse le pouvoir irrésistible que détient Matilda sur la conscience d’Ambrosio. J’expose aussi les façons dont ces deux personnes interagissent. En examinant la fragmentation et la duplicité d’Ambrosio avec Matilda, mon chapitre propose une réflexion sur la façon dont la nature fragmentée du discours monastique se négocie avec le désir inné de l’humain pour les plaisirs mondains.

Le deuxième chapitre examine l’échec qu’éprouve le personnage religieux à maintenir son autorité et son statut à cause de son manque d’expérience. Cette perte d’autorité et de statut est expliquée par l’incapacité du personnage à discipliner son corps subjugué. J’examine le renversement du pouvoir pastoral qui avait Ambrosio pour le compte du personnage transgressif

féminin. Enfin, je présente le corps comme étant un lieu d'inconfort menant à déstabiliser « les relations de pouvoir ».

Le troisième chapitre étudie la perte de sécurité dans la société patriarcale et ses répercussions sur les relations humaines. Il examine alors les impacts de l'effondrement du système hiérarchique sur le genre et ses performances. Ce chapitre met en lumière les corruptions spirituelles, sexuelles et sociales. En effet, le jumelage de différents personnages a permis d'identifier clairement ces corruptions. J'explore également le rétablissement de la justice sociale lorsque les personnages corrompus se sont offert une chance de se découvrir soi-même sans pour autant échapper à la peine à la fin de leurs vies.

Mots-clés : Corruption, souillure, péché, pouvoir, fragmentation, Matthew Lewis

Abstract

“Transgression in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* and the Fragmentation of the Self” is an investigation of the different stages that the human conscience undertakes and the conducts that each stage produces. It pays particular attention to the conversion of good to evil and the motives that nourish this conversion. By focusing on the spiritual defilement as a first step that leads to the concrete manifestation of evil, the thesis explores the subsequent parallel between the conscience of virtue and the conscience of malice. It examines the confused identity of its characters under an oppressive ruling system and explores the mechanism of power in relation to discourse, knowledge, and the body.

The first chapter deals with the degradation of the path of sanctity into that of profanity. It closely examines the growth of evil in Ambrosio’s conscience from the first instance of defilement to the eventual act of sin and the subsequent destruction he endures. I focus on Matilda’s overwhelming manipulation of his character and demonstrate the ways they intertwine. By examining Ambrosio’s fragmentation and duplicity with Matilda, my chapter negotiates the fragmented nature of the monastic discourse with the human innate longing for worldly pleasures.

The second chapter scrutinizes the religious figure’s failure to maintain his status of power when the knowledge he possesses is inexperienced. In this chapter, I question the status of power as dissolved and disbanded when it does not succeed in disciplining the subjugated body. I examine the reversal of pastoral power to the credit of the female transgressive character; and I finally conclude with the analysis of the body as the locus of trauma in the nexus of power relations.

The third chapter studies the loss of certainty in patriarchal society. It examines the impacts of the failed hierarchal system on gender and its performance. This chapter illuminates

the immediate spiritual, sexual, and social corruptions, and tackles the variety of twinings that take place in the novel as a response to the stated corruptions. I also negotiate the restoration of social justice when the corrupt characters are offered a chance to self-discovery but do not escape punishment at the end of their lives.

Keywords: corruption, defilement, sin, power, fragmentation, Matthew Lewis

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Introduction

Mathew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk*, published in 1796, is one of the most influential masterpieces published in the late Eighteenth Century to address the apprehensions of the inquisition and the shortcomings of Catholic rule. *The Monk* offers an audacious commentary on the oppressive religious and political institution of The Spanish Inquisition's Holy Office. The universal feelings of horror, tyranny, and subjugation are the major issues that the novel explores.

The literary gothic trend amplifies the horrors of patriarchal oppression, religious sovereignty, and noble superiority in order to engage with the worries of the century and the incurred wounds of its audience. In this trend, the gothic elements of murder, rape, death, graveyards, and witchcraft further contribute to the denunciation of the ruling system as well as the ultimate restoration of order and rebirth. In the prevailing darkness of the atmosphere, the recourse to inhuman uncanny power is essential to create a suspenseful representation of sexual obsession and spiritual defilement. In a captivating way, Lewis's novel conveys these aspects of horror to translate his century's anxieties. Within the historical background of the novel, Lewis found, in pen and par, a compelling technique to criticize the Catholic institution. His romance, *The Monk*, unveils the falseness of the religious establishment by exposing the flaws that were masked under the cover of divinity. His aim is to demonstrate the breakdown of humanity in favour of false holiness. But beyond depicting horrifying events, the author crafts a thorough representation of the process through which human desire degrades from spiritual defilement to obsession, and eventually converts into violence and trauma as inexorable sides of human nature.

What sustains interest in this particular book is the suspenseful illustration of the ideal good versus extreme evil. By examining the human psychology of good in opposition

to demonic malevolence, the book provides a comprehensive exposé of the different stages to which human nature devolves and depicts the conducts that result from each stage. *The Monk* is a valuable masterpiece for its variety of approaches. It is wide-ranging in dealing with the conscience of virtue as opposed to the conscience of evil. With a gradual decadence from holiness to malice, *The Monk* addresses the enduring psychological issues rooted in mankind. Even though it belongs to the movement of Gothicism, the author meticulously inserts universal themes that relate to contemporary issues. The scrutiny of purity versus sinfulness in Matthew Lewis' depiction makes the novel plausible, even though supernaturalism functions as a main theme in his narrative. The significant way with which the duality between the characters is tackled adds to the pleasurable experience of reading the book. In a variety of ways, the author presents self-alienation, confused identities, and corruption. By presenting the fragmented identity of one character in conjunction to other characters, the author proposes an interesting way to examine human nature, as well as ways to detect fragmentation. In addition, the careful writing style which perfectly attracts the visual, the sonorous, as well as the imaginative skills to absorb the events and to implicate the reader in the narrative framework contribute largely to the stimulating experience of reading the book. Hence, my thesis undertakes an investigation of the narrative's development as well as the characters' progressions on the path of transgression through the plot structure. The three chapters of my study scrutinize the steps that the human deflection undergoes from the path of righteousness and the motifs that inspire this deviation.

The present thesis exceeds the limitations of an analysis that places the core of criticism on the author's projection of his self-deviation. My perspective, therefore,

examines the romance as a product of a patriarchal system that manipulates the lives of dominated people and overthrows every sense of individual agency and communal tolerance of natural urges. The mystification of the narrative highlights the progression into the path of falsehood and the development of evil within the soul when instincts and desires are repressed. The approach that this thesis takes examines the construction of the religious knowledge within the discourse of sacredness to lead to an eventual devastation when the power that implements it conflicts with the interior needs of its representatives. The fragmentation of the self, a fundamental theme of the novel, is emphasized in this thesis's approach. The aim of this analysis is to focus on the character of Ambrosio as a complex figure. However, the investigation of his lived experience doesn't aim to conclude whether he is innocent or guilty. His fragmented nature makes him both regardless of the other characters' external influences. This insistence on Ambrosio's fragmented identity forms the essence of this analysis.

Within its historical context, *The Monk* is a text that draws a parallel between the violence of the inquisitor and the innocence of the restrained people. In "Matilda and The Rhetoric of Deceit," Peter Grudin remarks that "Lewis took care to situate his narrative in Spain and to place it within the historical context of the Spanish Inquisition. Matilda's role is consistent with the mythology suggested by the plot and its context" (140). With the collapse of the hierarchical social, religious, and political reign of Catholicism in the face of villainy, and the defeat of oppression in the face of corruption, *The Monk* reconstructs supremacy and establishes a social order that eliminates the treacherous representatives of Catholicism. Even though the eradication of those who symbolize virtue is necessary in the process of punishing the villains, their destruction constitutes a metaphor for the disjointed

supremacy of the Spanish Inquisition, the way Ambrosio, the monk, is fragmented between his virtue and his evilness. Accordingly, my thesis interprets transgression as a means of resistance to the political, sexual, and social oppressions that dominated the era with a close investigation of Ambrosio's conflicted identity.

Some critics have been interested in analysing Ambrosio's identity as a victim of Matilda's manipulation. For example, Peter Grudin focuses mostly on Matilda's "abnormal consciousness" (139) as the cause of Ambrosio's "perdition" (139). He states that "before her confession, she salts its rhetorical potential with this artful strip-tease, repetition creates emphasis, and this emphasis combines with coincidence to excite our suspicions" (139). Others, such as Wendy Jones, rather categorize him as a culprit of his own thrust. Jones' approach focuses on his longing for motherly affection, undermining respectively his consciousness of evil and the motives of resistance behind his transgression. The present thesis, however, aims at scrutinizing the fragmentation and duality of the self, exemplified in Ambrosio, the monk, and Ambrosio, the human being. In so doing, my examination of his transgression unsettles the dichotomy that has come to define him as either wholly evil or blindly manipulated.

The Monk is outlined within a specific historical context of oppression and domination. Lewis frames his masterpiece in an era of overwhelming frustration and prejudice that his novel projects. The 18th Century Spanish Inquisition resonates in the book's treatment of violence, prejudice, and corruption. At this stage, a quick illustration of the historical background is convenient. The Spanish Inquisition ran under the sovereign of the monarchy and the Catholic Church. It was legitimately founded in 1478 with the aim of extending a universal law based on the Bible. Between the Twelfth and the Nineteenth

centuries, Europe witnessed a series of inquisitions to overspread the ideals of Catholicism and to repress all religious and political activism operating against its rule. Heresy was brutally condemned by the monarchy and the Roman Catholic Church, because this act opposed the Church's sanctioned ideology. In an attempt to define the term "inquisition", Shanna Freeman affirms that:

The word "inquisition" refers to the tribunal court system used by both the Catholic Church and some Catholic monarchs to root out, suppress and punish heretics. These were baptized members of the church who held opinions contrary to the Catholic faith. (1)

The Catholic institution established a clear and well-organized definition of heresy and was fanatical towards any form of transgression that did not conform to its belief system. Torture and execution were ways to punish the heretics who worked against the reign of the church. Their activism was, in fact, perceived as transgressive of and violating to the dominating law of the Church. Freeman asserts that it was not sufficient for the authorities to condemn a heretic of an act of heresy. The inquisitor was also looking for confessions against other undeclared heretics who were working of their own free will. Suspicious heretics were put in jail for many years until they confessed their acts. At the same time, those who were proven guilty could avoid severe chastisement, but they were smartly questioned until they incriminated other active heretics. Torture and harsh means of punishments were legitimized by Pop Innocent VI in 1252, when questionnaires and investigations failed to lead to a confession. Confessions obtained under torture were not considered credible; they made the heretic confess once again when the torture ended.

Jews, Muslims, New Christians, and Protestants were the primary targets of the inquisition because of their religious background conflicted with the Roman Church. The inquisition mostly intended to eradicate the unity of the Jewish community by banishing the Conversos, a term which refers to undisclosed Jews, from Spain. Through oppression, the Spanish inquisition's ultimate aim was to "create religious unity and weaken local political authorities and familial alliances" (Freeman 2). Its purpose was to spread the domination of the Roman Catholic Church's authority over the country as much as it did in other European countries. It also extended its supremacy considerably to their colonies in Asia and the New World. By the end of the Eighteenth Century, the Spanish Inquisition ceased its activities, but its repressive ruling system and tyrannical structure resonated in literary and artistic productions of the era.

While my thesis contextualizes the novel as a product of the Spanish Inquisition's oppression through the character of Ambrosio as both guilty and innocent, some critics tend to disregard one aspect of his human entity and categorize him as either evil by nature or as a victim of Matilda's manipulation.

In order to situate my work, a brief literature review is useful at this point. Scholars who have analyzed *The Monk* focus on the perverse sexual and religious behavior of Ambrosio, the protagonist, for they are the chief manifestations of his violation of the spiritual codes. Mario Praz's classic study analyzes the monk significantly in *The Romantic Agony*, in which Praz points out that the Gothic tradition highlights themes of sexual as well as religious deviation, atrocity, rape, incest, and murder. Many of the critics who have provided a compelling interpretation of Ambrosio's perverse behavior have drawn upon Sigmund Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex. In her psychoanalytic reading of *The*

Monk, Anne Williams describes Ambrosio as “a gothic version of Oedipus” (120) whose downfall is caused by the precarious company of women, such as Matilda, who symbolizes the unregulated female sexuality in the patriarchal society of the Eighteenth century (117). Following the same path, Wendy Jones argues that Ambrosio’s perversity originates mainly from his desperate longing for maternal love: “His unknowable and secret desire for his mother haunts him throughout his life” (134). The use of Freudian theory has led to substantial interpretations of the protagonist’s behavior and stimulus. However, scholars have not applied the theory of the Oedipus complex to examine the derivations of Ambrosio’s motivations in his relationships with the female gender in the novel. In literary criticism, Ambrosio’s transgression has not been examined in correlation with the fragmented human nature that he discovers through the book’s events. This oversight constitutes this thesis’s contribution to the academic discourse on this novel.

For many, the extravagant evil that Ambrosio exemplifies has formed the fundamental source of criticism. The novel’s audacious depiction of evil created a controversy at the time because of its challenging subject matters it discussed as well its perplexing and chaotic representation of Catholic rule in Spain. The book received harsh criticism from the authorities and from the people who embraced the supremacy of the Catholic Church. In addition, the novel did not obtain much appreciation for the gothic elements it included in the construction of the narrative. It contains instances of sorcery, witchcraft, and supernatural devices. Those elements, which were condemned by the Spanish Inquisition as much as heretics were for divorcing with the belief that God was the only power to draw humans’ fates, are largely implemented in the novel.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge responded to Lewis's masterpiece in "Review of Lewis's *The Monk*" to denounce some features of the writer's book. He states that "the errors and defects are [...] numerous, and (we are sorry to add) of greater importance" (296). Through the character of Ambrosio, Lewis proves that evil resides within the realm of good and that the purest human spirit can be spoiled by the most heinous sins. The mediocrity that Lewis depicts in his characterization of the religious institution constituted the main subject of criticism that Coleridge emphasizes when he says that "if a parent saw in the hands of a son or daughter, he might reasonably turn pale" (197). For the uncontrolled sexual appetite that turned the course of the events to the extreme, the fallacious religious performance of holiness and purity, and the dependence on supernatural forces to achieve corrupt goals, the novel divorces with the conventional mainstream belief in human command under the banner of God. In incorporating scenes of extreme horror for the purpose of satisfying persistent sexual desires outside the institution of marriage, Coleridge accused the author of "a low and vulgar taste" (99). When Ambrosio determines to realize his endeavours, the recourse to inhuman power was hugely involved and this was central in Coleridge's criticism of Lewis's narrative. He severely criticized the diminishment of human agency and spiritual limpidness. In his analysis of Ambrosio, Coleridge argues that he is "impossible ... contrary to nature" in the way his characterization displays a perplexing combination between the limits of religious faith and the reliance on mystic tools to contradict the appeals to holy devotion.

Another critic rejects Lewis's choice of subject matter and links the "inaccuracy" of the plot structure to the author's personal instability. David Lorne MacDonald states in *Monk Lewis: A Critical Biography* that:

There is a moral in the life of this man... He was a reckless defiler of the public mind; a profligate, he cared not how many were to be undone when he drew back the curtain of his profligacy; he had infected his reason with the insolent belief that the power to corrupt made the right, and that conscience might be laughed, so long as he could evade law. *The Monk* was an eloquent evil; but the man who compounded it knew in his soul that he was compounding poison for the multitude, and in that knowledge he sent it into the world.

(74)

In addition, in *Gothic reflections: Narrative Force in Nineteenth Century Fiction*, Peter K. Garrett affirms that:

Gothic writers may then seem bound in Hamlet's nutshell with their own bad dreams, and we can read *The Castle of Otranto* or *The Monk*, for example, as projections of their authors' unresolved oedipal conflicts. (53)

Accordingly, Lewis's departure from mainstream ideas has made of him a revolutionary writer whose innovative writing skills draw a correlation between his character's evil and his own identity.

In an attempt to contribute to the academic studies stated above, this thesis explores different angles from which the novel can be studied. The first chapter of the present thesis, "A Reading of Ambrosio's Transgression from Sanctity to Profanity: Negotiating Perversity within Paul Ricoeur's theory of *The Symbolism of Evil*," investigates the overall

steps that the abbot undergoes in his deviation from the path of sanctity to that of profanity. Central to my analysis of the phenomenological progression of evil is the monk is deeply influenced by female physical beauty, and women have a great ability to manipulate him. The first chapter initially scrutinizes the monk's conduct from the first instance of desire. It then draws its evolution into rivalry and violence, and finally explains the evacuation of this violence and his experience of guilt. *The Monk* is a very profound and revealing novel that uncovers effectively, if not abruptly, these stages. The similarities between the plot of the novel and Paul Ricoeur's description of the process of evil are striking and it is precisely these similarities that I try to unveil for the sake of a better understanding of human nature, human relations, and human desire. By studying phenomenology and hermeneutics as defined by Ricoeur, we can understand the various psychological and spiritual states that Lewis makes Ambrosio inhabit as long as the latter fragments. The weakness of religious faith and the dimness of spiritual devotion to God are placed at the heart of the transgressions taking place in the novel. My primary examination of the character of Ambrosio's vicious behavior engages with the fragmentation between the monastic discourse of sanctity and the ever-increasing appetite to enjoy worldly pleasures. The discourse of power he exemplifies and the Catholic knowledge he possesses cause him slow suffering and deep agony for their unfitting with an internal call for liberation. This particular dilemma that the process of transgression amplifies is analysed as a means of resistance to the political, the sexual, and the social oppressions imposed on the representative of God. The sexual desire that nourishes his relationship with the Madonna, then Matilda, and eventually Antonia derives from a keen embodiment of the patriarchal ideals of superiority, which are meant to be applied in relation to the opposite gender.

Along with the transgressive nature and the violation of the rigid rules, the abbot symbolizes a patriarchal perception in his interactions with female characters. The present paralleled but seemingly paradoxical natures accentuate the monk's fragmentation of the self that constitutes the general argument of this thesis.

The second chapter, "The Conflicting Mechanism of Knowledge in *The Monk* and The Role of The Body in Power Relations," is informed by Foucault's interrelation of power. It is informed by the Foucauldian theory that traces power as a horizontal mechanism exercised within a network of relations. The theoretical approach on which my examination of the novel is framed differentiates from a reading that power is held by one character over another one. It does not consider power as possessed by a single figure. Power is rather unpossessed and operates in relation to, instead of over, something or someone. Language that translates the acquired knowledge is fundamental in the deployment of power. It is this instrument that my study concentrates on as a means that both inflicts pain and agony over its tyrannical possessor as much as over those who do not possess it. My discussion encompasses the intellectual, the spiritual, as well as the physical aspects of human nature.

The third chapter, "Gender Confusion and the Destruction of Hierarchy in *The Monk*," inspects the impacts of the corrupt system of hierarchy and patriarchy. This final chapter concludes the exploration of the spiritual defilement, the reversal of the status of power, and the lack of knowledge with an investigation of the blurred gender distinction in the novel. Central to my approach in this chapter is the subtlety with which *The Monk* portrays gender confusion. In a very realistic manner, it succeeds in faithfully departing from a prescribed gender distinction, one that suggests the loss of certainty in this

patriarchal society. By applying Judith Butler's work on gender theory to the novel, I clarify the effects of transgenering in relation to the gothic novel's liberation of existing fears. The third chapter examines the loss of gender identity in the novel by focusing on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity as the central framework illuminating the investigation of the spiritual, sexual, as well as social corruptions.

My choice to include Butler's theory in relation to Ricoeur's phenomenology and Hermeneutics and Foucault's power relations and the body is deliberate. Their theories allow me to inspect the interrelation between the gradual steps of transgression in conjunction with the manifestation of power through discourse and knowledge, which ultimately results in gender confusion. My central aim in these three chapters is to scrutinize the fragmentation of the self as exposed by multiple gothic twinings in the novel. By framing the present thesis on Paul Ricoeur's phenomenology, Michel Foucault's mechanism of discourse, knowledge and power, as well as Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity, my thesis intensifies the gothic features of vice and horror. My analysis thereby draws a parallel between the aims of the Spanish Inquisition, its tools and its ends, as well as people's resistance to the reign of tyranny. The failure of the system, the restoration of social justice when the villains get punished, and the condemnation of religious rule constitute the author's mechanism of criticism. He proposes that fragmented feelings of good and evil can always coexist when oppression and the desire to resist it overwhelm human existence.

**Chapter One: A Reading of Ambrosio's Transgression
from Sanctity to Profanity: Negotiating Perversity
within Paul Ricoeur's theory of The Symbolism of Evil**

To grasp the course of the events that Lewis chose for the novel and the degradation of virtue, it is necessary to study the mechanism of evil in relation to the secondary characters of the book. In this chapter, I will explore Ambrosio's sexual damnation by reading through Ricoeur's approach to hermeneutical phenomenological theory in his book *The Symbolism of Evil*. Ambrosio's path undergoes the three steps toward moral decadence that Ricoeur highlights in his book. It begins with defilement and sin, to then move on to guilt, and finally ends in damnation. Scholars, such as Becky Lee Meadows, have adopted Ricoeur's theory to depict Ambrosio's transgression from holiness to immorality as a reflection of his trivial consciousness. In my analysis, however, I read immorality as a projection of the gothic twinning taking place between characters. In this chapter, my aim is to investigate Paul Ricoeur's theory in my study of Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* to illuminate the importance of duality as a mechanism that initiates transgression and results in the fragmentation of the principal character. By studying phenomenology and hermeneutics as defined by Ricoeur, we can understand the various psychological and spiritual states that Lewis makes Ambrosio inhabit when the latter fragments. The female consorts become analogues of Ambrosio's spiritual defilement. In this chapter, the development of Ambrosio's character from holiness to damnation will be outlined, followed by an interpretation of how Ricoeur's theory applies to the text.

According to Christopher Ryan B. Maboloc, "we find it important to understand the meaning of active involvement in the different dimensions of life, political or social, through a phenomenological investigation of the conscious act of willing and its purpose, a purpose fully realized in human action" (1). Framing my analysis of the primary character of *The Monk* on this approach enables me to understand Ambrosio's ambivalence

between his spiritual vows and the path of resistance he undergoes. Between the majestic reputation he gains at the beginning of the novel and the degradation of his “actions” as soon as he encounters the female characters, Ambrosio’s fluctuation between sin and morality sharpens. The phenomenological decadence of his conduct illuminates the wavering nature of his “purpose,” which constitutes the essence of this thesis. Under the light of Ricoeur’s theory of hermeneutics and phenomenology, the main objective of this chapter is to investigate the spiritual and religious corruptions that are take place in the novel.

Ricoeur articulates his philosophy of hermeneutics and phenomenology as the science that studies and interprets human experience in order to describe and demonstrate the nature of existence. It “is not a method of research but, rather, both a theoretical perspective and a methodology, a strategy or plan that lies behind the methods employed in a particular study” (Crotty, 1998). This science plays an interchangeable role in conveying an insightful meaning to the human experience. To describe the aim of Ricoeur’s philosophical approach, scholars who have adopted his insight emphasize that:

Both hermeneutics and phenomenology have been variously defined, but for the purposes of the study underpinning this article, they were taken to have the following meanings: Hermeneutics is the “art and science of interpretation” especially as it applies to text (Ezzy 24). Phenomenology is the study of the essence of a phenomenon as it presents itself in lived experience in the world (Crotty, 1998) (“Ricoeur’s Theory of Interpretation: An Instrument for Data Interpretation in Hermeneutic Phenomenology” 2)

Thus, hermeneutics analyse and interpret, according to a methodological strategy that decodes the symbols and the signs, a given experience lived in the word.

Ricoeur’s notion of the hermeneutical phenomenological dissipation of spirituality provides an examination of the process through which the self undergoes the path of “evil.” The phenomenological path to transgression enables me to deconstruct the manifestation of evil in *The Monk*. Paul Ricoeur initiates the notion of “the servile will” (*The Symbolism of Evil*, 101) as allowing external influences to affect human behavior. In this chapter, I will start with an exploration of Ricoeur’s notion of “the servile will” within the theory of hermeneutics and phenomenology. My aim is to provide an examination of Ambrosio’s transformation from active agent of holiness to active agent of sinfulness.

To get a clear understanding of Ambrosio’s phenomenological transgression from the moral codes of the Catholic Church, it is necessary to grasp the significance of the symbols presented to the reader in Lewis’s text. These symbols are characters, settings,

events and actions that affect the development of the protagonist's violation of his religious and spiritual vows. They connote the interconnectivity between the external, the internal, and the response to both spheres. In this sense, symbols are fundamental to the formation of the self and to one's integration with the environment he or she inhabits. As stated by Ryan B. Maboloc:

Paul Ricoeur's philosophy is an embodied consciousness who realizes his possibilities in the world through responsible human action. Human consciousness is not an abstract reality; it also feels pain and joy. The subject is rooted in the world where he discovers relationships that concretize his being as man. It also allows him to experience the real meaning of human existence, being with and for others. (30)

In *The Monk*, Ambrosio discovers the material meaning of life when he plunges in the world of coexistence. With the other characters and through them, he discovers his divided identity and consequently decides to deviate from embodying a "responsible human action" (Maboloc, 30). This fits well with Ricoeur's notion of "the servile will," which suggests the paradox between freedom and its limitations. For Ricoeur, "the servile will" is "the concept of a man who is responsible and captive, or rather a man who is responsible for being captive—in short, the concept of the servile will" (*The Symbolism of Evil*, 101). It is the reality of the unescapable imprisonment, in the sense that freedom is never detached from the environment that dictates it nor the choices that fix it.

In *The Monk*, Ambrosio's radical shift from virtue to vice resonates with his inability to moderate his longing for freedom. As expressed by Ricoeur, humankind is a prisoner of his or her own drives, urges, and passions. The body is a limited space that responds to external temptations with a mental struggle between devotion to the law of God or breaking the oath. In *The Symbolism of Evil*, Ricoeur affirms that:

The captivity of the body and even the captivity of the soul in the body are the symbol of the evil that the soul inflicts on itself, the symbol of the affection of freedom by itself, the "losing" of the soul assures us retrospectively that its "bonds" were the bonds of desire, active-passive fascination, autcaptivity, "to be lost" means the same thing. (154)

In the novel, Lewis adopts a gothic model based on the paradox between the physical needs of the body and the limited resistance to them. Ambrosio, the fallen monk, perfectly embraces the idea of "the servile will" through his inability to protest against the insistent appeals of his body to enjoy worldly pleasures. Central to my chapter is an exploration of the ways the defiled character transforms from good to evil. My principal aim is to investigate the consciousness of evil under the light of Ricoeur's philosophical theory of hermeneutics and phenomenology. With a focus on Ricoeur's theoretical approach, I attempt to decode the gothic symbols of the text and develop an interpretation of Ambrosio's progression to immoral deviation.

A Phenomenological Framework of Sin, Guilt, and Evil for Lewis's *The Monk*

In *Hermeneutic Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, Don Idhe suggests that language is articulated through symbols. Meanings and interpretations formulate the language. Thus, it is important, in the first place, to deconstruct the symbols of Lewis's text in order to grasp the profound meaning of the language presented to the reader. For this purpose, Paul Ricoeur states that "symbols give rise to thought" (*The Symbolism of Evil*, 19). On the one hand, it enables us to understand Ambrosio's progression on the path of defilement; and on the other hand, it sharpens Ambrosio's self-awareness. Ricoeur writes that:

A purely semantic elucidation remains suspended until one shows that the understanding of multivocal or symbolic expressions is a moment of self-understanding; the semantic approach thus entails a reflective approach. But the subject that interprets himself while interpreting signs is no longer the cogito: rather, he is a being who discovers, by the exegesis of his own life, that he is placed in being before he places and possesses himself. In this way, hermeneutics would discover a manner of existing which would remain from start to finish a being-interpreted. Reflection alone, by suppressing itself as reflection, can reach the ontological roots of understanding. Yet this is what always happens in language, and it occurs through the movement of reflection. (*Existence and Hermeneutics*, 10-11)

For Ricoeur, life is “the bearer of meaning” (*Ricoeur’s Critical Theory*, 29), and the human mind permits to formulate the significance of the various “meanings” in a lucid way. In *The Monk*, Lewis’s language, contained either in Ambrosio’s monologues or in omnipresent narration, enables the reader to understand the symbols. The interpretation of these symbols leads to a provocative reflection on the protagonist’s self-consciousness and his eventual condemnation. In her dissertation entitled “The Consciousness of Damnation: A Hermeneutical Phenomenology of the Fall of The Self in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*,” Becky Lee Meadows affirms that:

The interpretation of symbols and metaphors which is hermeneutics, leads to fuller self-interpretation. However, language is the expression of experience, and the description of fault or evil leads to confession – the written or verbal expression of that experience, which is usually expressed in symbols and metaphors-and these, according to Ricoeur, must be interpreted hermeneutically. (20)

To examine Ambrosio’s conversion from being the ambassador of heaven to being the flag-holder of hell, Ricoeur’s idea of the soul being bound to the body applies in a large scope. In fact, Lewis attempts to produce his protagonist’s lived experience as encompassing the abstract of the soul and the material of the body. When the abstract divorces with the material, the body rebels in order to contain the absolute freedom that the human being cannot possess. By creating the character of Ambrosio, Lewis aims to chart the dilemma that the dichotomy of the identity results in when his consciousness of evil

totally rejects the peaceful appeals of his soul. By so doing, he invites the reader to diagnose the split between the soul and the body, to reconcile both spheres in order to omit the burden of self-estrangement and thereby gain a harmonious self-identity.

In *The Symbolism of Evil*, Ricoeur underlines the aspect of evil in human nature as a central characteristic of humanity. He begins by exploring the notion of “the servile will,” and then deconstructs the path of damnation as a process that is composed of defilement, sin, and guilt. Hermeneutics and phenomenology are essential to understand the implications of evil and explore the consciousness of fault through the language of confession. According to Paul Ricoeur, the stages of symbolism “stake out the movement that leaps from the life in symbols towards thought, thought that truly starts out from symbols” (7). In this process, language is fundamental because the “understanding of symbols can play a part in the movement towards the point of departure; for, if the beginning is to be reached, it is first necessary for thought to inhabit the fullness of language” (348). Applying Ricoeur’s philosophy of the conjunction between hermeneutics and phenomenology leads to a compelling analysis of the symbols of evil that stimulate Ambrosio’s interactions with the characters of the novel. His transgression from the norms of virtue and holiness constitute a fertile ground of interpretation that reflects his inner consciousness of evil. Personal thoughts, ideas, and actions are influenced by one’s interactions with the external world. Robert Detweiler highlights the interrelation between the subject and the object in his article “Story, Sign, and Self: Phenomenology and Structuralism as Literary Critical Methods.” He suggests that “to study the symbolism of evil through confessions of fault is to study basic epistemology and ontology that will illuminate the nature and interaction of self, will, and other” (58). Hence, Ambrosio’s

downfall, which is caused by his relations with the female characters in the novel, can be read within the realm of Paul Ricoeur's *The Symbolism of Evil* as influenced by external forces. As noted by Christopher Ryan B. Maboloc in his article "Paul Ricoeur's Phenomenology of the Will," "as individuals, we are conscious human beings who struggle through life because there seems to be a disjuncting between human consciousness and our incarnate existence making our effort to live well difficult and sometimes seemingly hopeless" (1). Thus, in Ambrosio's life experience, the constant bewilderment of his state of mind surfaces when his interactions with the external world take him on a trajectory that faces him with the appetites the abbey has taught him to repress.

In his analysis of human nature, Ricoeur acknowledges the prominence of need in the way that freedom is vital to human equilibrium. Psychoanalysis and structuralism, as adopted by Freud and Saussure, were flourishing in this era; and they similarly treat issues of fault but in a different way. Yet, Ricoeur's outlooks were strictly embedded in the tradition of phenomenology combined with hermeneutics preoccupied with the problems of language. He highlights the importance of language in decoding the signs. It "becomes a system of signs defined by their differences alone" (*Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 9). Accordingly, thoughtful philosophy must be grounded in the analysis of consciousness and human nature in general. From this perspective, Ricoeur draws the theory of hermeneutic philosophy as the essence of language and its interpretation. As sentences are composed of signs to be interpreted, it is, at this level, that language becomes the revelation of the system of signs that are subjects to sometimes conflicting interpretations. For that reason, Ricoeur invokes that any written work is a work of discourse which, according to its genre and style, calls for a specific interpretation. He also

defines the term ‘appropriation’ as meaning “that the interpretation of text culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject [the interpreter] who thenceforth understands himself better, understands himself differently, or simply begins to understand himself” (*Paul Ricoeur Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 158). Furthermore, in *The Theory of Interpretation*, he argues that “Just as language in actualizing itself in discourse goes beyond itself in the speech event, so speech in entering into the process of understanding goes beyond itself in meaning” (132). Thus, to interpret the development of evil in *The Monk*, it is necessary to investigate the language of the characters, their interactions with each other, and their inner consciousness. For him, the interpretation of the text originates from an understanding and an interpretation of the self in the first place. When Ambrosio, in *The Monk*, fails to fully acquire the capacity of interpreting himself, understanding his urges and specifying his ‘purpose,’ he loses the ability to coexist with the other characters. He becomes driven by an insistent need for absolute freedom emerging from his lack of experience to interact with the external world and to regulate his actions and conduct in function of the limitations imposed on everyone. A good understanding of the signs of a given text leads to an insightful interpretation, as “it seems possible to situate explanation and interpretation along a unique hermeneutical arc and to integrate the opposed attitudes of explanation and understanding within an overall conception of reading as the recovery of meaning” (*Paul Ricoeur Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 23). Similar to the way literary texts display meanings that require interpretations, human actions call for interpretation. In this sense, Ricoeur advocates the conjunction between the theory of interpretation and philosophical reflection. In his book *Freud and Philosophy: an Essay on Interpretation*, Ricoeur affirms that “reflection must become interpretation because I

cannot grasp the act of existing except in signs scattered in the world” (46). In this way, my critical approach to Ambrosio’s transgression is rooted in the interpretation of his psyche and his interactions with the female characters as the major symbols involved in the book to generate a discovery of a dual identity that is translated through radical actions. Since “Phenomenology, [...] was seen as a movement away from the Cartesian dualism of reality being something “out there” or completely separate from the individual” (Jones, 1975; Koch, 1995), Ambrosio’s transgressive nature is formed in relation to the surrounding world in which he dwells. It directly affects him and results in the ambivalent state he occupies between virtue and sin.

Paul Ricoeur deconstructs the consciousness of evil by pointing out the major experiences of defilement, sin, and guilt. According to him, these ‘symbols’ are necessary to understand how a human nature defiles, commits sin, and then feels guilt. To display the complexity of evil and the different ways through which it can be expressed, the ‘language of confession’ (*The Symbolism of Evil*, 7) plays a primordial role. This latter locates evil and identifies it:

Language is the light of the emotions. Through confession the consciousness of fault is brought into the light of speech; through confession man remains speech, even in the experience of his own absurdity, suffering and anguish. (*The Symbolism of Evil*, 7)

Language that expresses the evil nature of man is highly symbolic. Ricoeur reflects upon the concept of evil through the religious confession. In a translation of Paul Ricoeur’s *The Symbolism of Evil*, Emerson Buchanan states that “evil in this study is not focused on its

essential possibility, but on the existential reality of human fault which is vividly manifested through human religious confession of evil'' (7). Defilement, sin and guilt are interrelated in a harmonious way and this is the cornerstone of Ricoeur's philosophy of hermeneutic phenomenology. The language of confession is the medium through which evil is translated. It is a symbolic language. However, it does not fully convey the meaning of internalized evil in men. With its limits and flaws, it does not succeed in encountering the whole manifestations of evil. In this context, Paul Ricoeur states in *The Symbol...Food for Thought* that it is:

Most remarkable that there is no language for guilt but symbolic language. This means in the first place the highly archaic language of the stain, where evil is apprehended as a spot, a blot, and then as something positive which affects from without and pollutes. (17)

Ricoeur perceives evil as an exterior force that contaminates the human being. It is a nature that the person inherits from the external encounter with "concrete" objects. "Evil is explained and expressed through a scheme of exteriority to the human being. The stain is a quasi-material 'event,' which 'infects' humanity by concrete contact. The 'tainted being' needs, therefore, purification rites to be washed, cleansed, purified" (18). Thus, defilement, as advanced in Ricoeur's philosophy, is the result of a person's interactions with the external world. The dark stain that this encounter inflicts upon the soul gives rise to the internal concept of sin in a following stage. Hence, the human path of damnation begins with an external encounter with 'concrete' objects and becomes an internal experience,

manifested through sin. It is the expression of the split between human nature and the early commitment to sacred vows.

In this regard, Don Ihde illustrates in *Hermeneutic Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* that

It is precisely in the ‘objectification’ of the experience of evil, in its ritual-poetic expression, that Ricoeur sees the possibility for such a transformation. The symbol system is a system which defines the pure and the impure. Now it insinuates itself into the experience itself as an instrument by which the defiled self becomes conscience of itself... Dread expressed in words is no longer simply a cry, but an avowal. In short, it is by being refracted in words that dread reveals an ethical rather than a physical aim.

(30)

The experience of evil moves from the external symbolism of defilement to the internal feeling of fear and dread. It starts from the objective concept of contagion to the subjective experience of self-recognition. This internal feeling of fear leads to the “‘ethicization of defilement,’” and to a deeper recognition of the rupture with the voice of God. In this context, Ibid states in his translation of Ricoeur’s *The Symbolism of Evil* that:

The symbolism of evil is polarly opposed to the god before whom he stands, the penitent becomes conscious of his sin as a dimension of his existence and no longer only as a reality which haunts him.

(31)

Thus, Man embarks on a journey of sinful life when he or she departs from the sacred laws of God. The divorce between Man and the divine leads to sinful conducts that are introduced to the soul with the response to the signals of external trivial symbols. Defilement is motivated by the internalization of the exterior world and expressed through sins. In the process of moving from defilement to sin, feelings of anxiety and agony amplify. Ricoeur's *The Symbolism of evil* suggests that "in rising from the consciousness of defilement to the consciousness of sin, fear and anguish did not disappear; rather, they changed their quality" (63). He refers to the internalized feeling of dread that results from the breaking of sacred vows as "the dread of the wrath of God expressed in the images of presence and absence, of God removing his face or showing it in anger. Sin anthropomorphizes dread in a relational direction" (110), as articulated by Ihde.

The process of evil terminates with the feeling of guilt in which the human being experiences self-recognition, a state that arises once the internal feeling of blame irritates the soul. At this stage, the consciousness of good awakens to acknowledge, and then condemn, the burden of transgression and disobedience, and struggles against the awareness of the effects of misconduct. "The subject is fully aware of the repercussion of the act he wills. Thus, it is not now the external laws that bother him. His conscience is now the one bothering him" ("The Symbolisms of Evil: Paul Ricoeur's Affirmation of the

Subject,” 14). Thus, this self-recognition of the gravity of the flaws Man commits leads him to pray for forgiveness and compassion. Auto-evaluation and internal acknowledgment of his own defects is the phase in which the person realizes that evil dwells in his self, nurtured by himself and articulated by his deeds freely. It is a result of wrongdoings for which the person is entirely responsible. As illustrated in the article entitled “The Symbolisms of Evil: Paul Ricoeur’s Affirmations of the Subject,”

Freedom from the burden of guilt is only cast by pardon and forgiveness. This act of redemption becomes possible with the self’s realization of his fault. Even at this stage, the role of self-reflectiveness is very imposing. The origin of evil which is from the self is emphasized. The knowledge of evil in the guilt schema is from man himself who is the source of that evil experience. (14)

In the process of guilt, the person experiences a strong feeling of devaluation for departing from the sacred laws. It is, at this stage only, that he engages in a process of self-questioning and reflection to not commit the same faults again. Guilt incurred following an offense against the order or an infraction against the law of God. The experience of evil is now self-conscious. As underlined in *The Symbolism of Evil*, “The consciousness of guilt constitutes a veritable revolution in the experience of evil: that which is primary is no longer the reality of defilement... but the evil use of liberty, felt as an internal diminution of the value of the self” (102). Thus, evil progresses from the external scheme of defilement to the internal scheme of guilt. It emerges from the temptations of the physical world and results in the creation of an interior burden that agonises the person.

Evil and Guilt in *The Monk*: Linking the Soul and the Body with Ricoeur

Ricoeur's triangular scheme of evil, which consists of defilement, sin, and guilt, can be applied to Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* fits well with the protagonist's experience in the book. The friar initiates his experience of evil by defiling his soul with the pride that the society of Madrid loads upon him. His admiration of the tableau of Madona stains his soul when this admiration shifts from being an object of holiness to a symbol of female sexuality. Later on, he sins as soon as he encounters Matilda, who projects in him excessive lust that he extricates with the repetitive sexual discourses he shares with her, and then with Antonia. Over the course of the discovery of his dual identity, Ambrosio experiences the eventual step of guilt when he tries to refuse Matilda's recourse to the supernatural device of the mirror in order to gain control over Antonia. Guilt, at this stage, as suggested by Paul Ricoeur, emerges out of an internal realization of the inescapability of chastisement. Ambrosio internally recognizes the sanction of his wrongdoings, but does not explicitly embody the "language of confession" because his soul and body are irreparably sold to Satan. In the three stages of defilement, sin, and guilt, Ricoeur situates the body as the mediator between the soul and evil. In so saying, it becomes the agent that gives signals to the soul in order to liberate repressed desires and urges. *The Monk* exemplifies the interrelation between the calls of the body and the manner in which the soul responds to them. Paul Ricoeur embodies the approach that the body and the soul are intertwined in "existence." In an attempt to analyse Ricoeur's approach, Karl Simms explains that:

The Cartesian sees the person as divided into the body, which as an object has *objective existence*, and a soul, which has *subjective existence*. In removing the distinction between soul and body –or, more precisely, in demonstrating that a soul is impossible, so long as we are in the world, without a body- Ricoeur unites the objective and the subjective under the single heading of ‘existence’. (26)

Accordingly, the human soul cannot exist independently from the body. Their fusion produces sin, which on each turn is condemned by the soul when the conscience is awakened.

Conforming to Ricoeur’s emphasis on the duality between the body and the soul in the expression of hidden desires, the body in *The Monk* represents the locus of trauma through which Ambrosio, and the other main characters of the novel, liberate their suppressed impulses and become “enslaved” souls to the appeals of their bodies. Language is central in conveying the “consciousness of fault.” Drawing upon Ricoeur’s theory, it is possible to understand the evolution of evil in Ambrosio’s character. Matthew Lewis portrays his principal character, Ambrosio, as the embodiment of the triangular aspects of *The Symbolism of Evil*. From the very outset, we notice that his relationships with the female characters (whether animate or inanimate) emphasize his perversity and reinforce his violation of the codes of the church both spiritually and socially. Defilement is pronounced from the opening of the book. In fact, the sermon Ambrosio enunciates is an instance of defilement in itself. It is an exemplification of one of the seven deadly sins,

which is “pride.” After the preacher, Lewis depicts the way in which Ambrosio is perceived by the people of Madrid:

You will find it in every one’s mouth at Madrid. He seems to have fascinated the inhabitants; and, not having attended his sermons myself, I am astonished at the enthusiasm which he has excited. 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. (46)

This reputation that Ambrosio gains in Madrid intensively affects the way in which he perceives himself. From an omnipresent angle, Lewis reflects upon his character and conveys a sense of his self-perception:

I see no one but myself possessed of such resolution. Religion cannot boast Ambrosio’s equal! How powerful an effect did my discourse produce upon its auditors! How they crowded round me! How they loaded me with benedictions, and pronounced me the sole uncorrupted pillar of the church! (65)

Through this quotation, Lewis praises Ambrosio’s merits and raises him above mankind. He places him above humanity when he writes “his character is perfectly without reproach” (50). This is the perception Ambrosio cultivates about himself; it is in this way that his involvement in the path of defilement starts. Being arrogant and unaware of his

interior flaws, Ambrosio enables defilement to dwell in his soul. His false self-picture facilitates his deviation from virtue to sin. For that reason, Grudin affirms that “his initial transgressions do not lead him, however, into a world of chaos; they propel him into an artful and systematic labyrinth in which he must sin at every turning and in which the ball of thread handed to him by his paramour can lead only to the center” (142). Ricoeur illustrates that the sin of pride belongs to the seven deadly sins. As demonstrated in *The Symbolism of Evil*, the experience of defilement is an infection that one gets through interactions with the external world. Ricoeur suggests that “the representation of defilement dwells in the half-light of a quasi-physical infection that points towards a quasi-moral unworthiness” (35). In this way, people’s idealization of Ambrosio’s character represents the virus that “infect[s]” his soul and initiates his excessive feeling of pride. This is the first instance of stain that produces a false image of self-perception. Not only does Ambrosio’s insight of his identity drive him to experience a hidden form of defilement, but Matilda’s presence in his life also highlights the dark stain on his soul and brings corruption to the surface:

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.” (48)

In this description, Ambrosio is associated with both grandeur and austerity. He is depicted as a stern man whose “glance of [...] eye”, is “at once fiery and penetrating.” It might be

read as foreshadowing the cruelty of deeds Ambrosio is going to perform in the course of the novel. In addition, the choice of the word “penetrating” is deliberate and meticulous to predict the sexual act with which the abbot is going to subvert the reader’s expectations. At this stage, he is driven to commit additional sins that further soil his soul. In *Virtue and Terror: The Monk*, Peter Brooks argues that:

If recognition of the Holy means, on the psychological plane, a feeling of dependence—what Otto calls “creature feeling”—and a sense that one is “covered” by the numinous, Matilda understands that Ambrosio has moved out from under this cover, that a new relationship of dependency has been established, and must be acknowledged. (251)

As suggested in the listed quotation, the abbot departs from the spiritual devotion he has been expected to perform. He engages himself on the path of the devil where he develops a new relationship that definitely separates him from virtue and holiness. In the adoption of his new codes of behavior, Ambrosio has been masterfully brain-washed and Matilda alone recognizes the growing clash between her victim and his status. Her influence upon his life bears a fundamental significance since his conscience of evil is only a projection of the evil that resides in her own soul. Apprehension, confusion, and the terrifying actions of rape and murder that the newly-stimulated conscience has produced make Ambrosio and Matilda form a gothic twinning, which drives the abbot as well as his victims to their destruction. Her violation of Godly laws when she accesses the church disguised as Rosario and her initiation of the sexual intercourse with the monk could only enlarge the gap

between the divine vows and corruption. Instead of condemning his flaws and repressing the voice of iniquity that is newly introduced to him, Ambrosio talks to himself and tries to soothe the feeling of guilt he experiences:

Fear not, Ambrosio! Take confidence in the strength of your virtue.
Enter boldly into a world, to whose failings you are superior;
Reflect that you are now exempted from humanity's defects, and
defy all the arts of the spirits of darkness. They shall know you for
what you are. (41)

The Madonna, Women, and Ambrosio: The Path to the Fragmented Self

Through the various monologues that Ambrosio articulates from the time he starts to admire the tableau of the Virgin Mary, the monk engages in the path of damnation. His inner struggle between faith and evil is amplified when he starts to draw a contrast between life in the monastery and life outside its walls. In the first instance of Lewis's depiction of Ambrosio's inanimate relationship with the Madonna, the representation suggests a mirroring through which the Madonna projects the nature of virtue and good. "As he said this, 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. He paused, and gazed upon it with delight" (65). "Paus[ing]" in front of the tableau reveals the monk's yearning to see himself through the Madonna. He yearns to acquire her values and to represent her image in the society of Madrid. Joseph Adriano highlights Ambrosio's shift in perception in relation to the tableau of the Madonna. He suggests that through the

portrait, the friar reminds himself of virtue and at the same time, foreshadows his divorce from it:

Lewis is quick to reveal, however, that Ambrosio is deceiving himself. In his cell, the monk looks upon a picture of the virgin, which for two years has been an object of his adoration. The portrait is the first compelling evidence of a feminine archetype, for it is perceived as a divinity by Ambrosio, as an “ideal ... superior being,” in comparison to whom mortal women are “tainted” and “disgusting.” (Lewis 65-66) (Andriano 34-35)

At this stage, the abbot claims that “it is the Divinity that I admire” (66). However, His long-oppressed instincts have come shortly to the surface as he longs to enjoy the virgin’s beauty. Hence, Ambrosio and the Madonna form a twinning that reinforces his fragmented self that is developed further throughout the plot with the interference of other female characters.

Progressively, the admiration he has for the tableau of the Madonna takes a new trajectory in his mind when he starts to fantasize about it: “Fool that I am! Whither do I suffer my admiration of this picture to hurry me? Away, impure ideas!” (41). Lewis focuses on Ambrosio’s sexual and religious transgression through the inner monologues in which he freely liberates the voice of his impulses. The author’s aim is to convey the ways in which evil nourishes and progresses in Man’s mind. The monk is the main character of the novel, and he diverts the expectations of the audience. He is supposed to symbolize righteousness and chastity, wisdom and faith. Yet, through the monologues, the reader

penetrates the inner consciousness of the monk to discover the surprising dilemma within Ambrosio's fragmented self. Accordingly, Peter Brooke concludes that:

The novel can in fact be read as one of the first and most lucid contextualizations of life in a world where reason has lost its prestige, yet the Godhead has lost its otherness; where the Sacred has been reacknowledged but atomized, and its ethical imperatives psychologized. (249)

Through Ambrosio's lived experience, Lewis suggests a departure from the traditional patriarchal structure. When the religious representative's reason vanishes to leave room for impulses to settle and take control of his life, Lewis questions the Value of "the sacred." He problematizes its role in promoting the reasonable and repressing the emotional. Hence, through the domineering transgressive characters of the novel, Lewis proposes an establishment of the opposing mechanism. Its aim is to subvert the conventional morality and to reinsert the inevitability of emotions' ability to control human's life.

As the plot advances, Ambrosio deepens his involvement in the path of defilement. Under the guidance of his partner, Matilda, the deceitful monk commits incest (without knowing it), kills his own sister and mother, in addition to causing Agnes's misfortune. Defilement, in Ambrosio's experience, is predominantly inspired and nourished by the character of Matilda. Lewis depicts her as a brilliantly eloquent and a perfectly convincing woman who never fails at manipulating Ambrosio and convincing him to apply her devilish plans. Matilda's contribution to the awakening of Ambrosio's sexual fantasies is powerful when her body introduces him to lust:

Anxious to authorise the presence of his dangerous guest, yet conscious that her stay was infringing the laws of his order, Ambrosio's bosom became the theatre of a thousand contending passions. (98)

Matilda succeeds in converting Ambrosio's transgression from defilement to sin when she succeeds in exposing him to her double image. Gothic twinning between Ambrosio and Matilda manifests itself openly during the monk's sleep. The narrator employs the dream as a microscope that penetrates Ambrosio's repressed conscience of transgression. It functions as a metaphor to convey the duality of corruption that is introduced to their consciences. As

Matilda stood before him in his dreams, and his eyes again dwelt upon her naked breast; she repeated (*sic*) her protestations of eternal love, threw her arms round his neck, and loaded him with kisses: he returned them; he clasped her passionately to his bosom, (86)

Ambrosio's corrupted virtue amplifies and his fragmented identity intensifies. With the carnal desire they exhibit for each other, Matilda gains control over the monk, succeeds in seducing him, and above all, awakens his corrupted side. She becomes a mirror through which Ambrosio discovers the second inevitable part of his identity. Throughout the narrative framework, this intertwining conscience of evil that they both represent is projected in the monk's extreme sins committed against Antonia and his mother. As the

illegitimate affair between Ambrosio and Matilda breaks through, Lewis adopts a satiric tone that helps project the monk's interior awareness of deceit and evil. With metaphors like the veil, the dream, and the voice, the author presents the fragmentation of his identity between performing his divine duties and resisting their oppression upon his body: "While she sung, Ambrosio listened with delight: never had he heard a voice more harmonious; and he wondered how such heavenly sounds could be produced by any but angels" (94). In this quotation, the angelic voice Ambrosio enjoys symbolizes the voice of treachery within him. Ironically, the author uses the adjective "harmonious" to denote the fragmented experience of the self he undergoes. Since the duality of the nature that Ambrosio and Matilda interplay resonates in his ultimate violation not only of the sacred vows, but also innocent creatures, the voice of transgression that Matilda pronounces sounds "harmonious" to him because it helps him discover who he really is.

However, he loses interest after their sexual intercourse, and he dissociates himself from Matilda because he sympathizes with his love for her: "he would not easily find another mistress with whom he could indulge his passions so fully, and so safely" (205). His corruption parallels his fragmentation. As he becomes more corrupt, the monk becomes more fragmented. Ambrosio's oscillation between his pleasure in satisfying his sexual appeals and his torment at the gravity of his deeds worsens every time he submits to Matilda's temptations. His fragmented self deepens as he becomes more corrupt:

The burst of transport was passed: Ambrosio's lust was satisfied. Pleasure fled, and Shame usurped her seat in his bosom. Confused and terrified at his weakness, he drew himself from Matilda's arms: hid perjury presented itself before him: he reflected on the scene which had just been acted, and trembled at the consequences of a discovery. (204)

As described in this passage, Ambrosio undergoes a process of guilt as soon as he satisfies his sexual thrust. Pleasure and Shame are written in capital letters because they represent two sides of the same coin. As he advances on the path of transgression and villainy, the friar becomes more fragmented because the gap between his apparent virtue and his inner fraud sharpens so rapidly that he can no longer locate himself. The more Ambrosio progresses in corruption, the more Matilda mutates from being an object of beauty and a subject of carnal yearning to a suppressor of the calls of a virtuous conscience that manifests itself as soon as the flame of desire for her fades away:

Conscience painted to him in glaring colours his perjury and weakness; apprehension magnified to him the horrors of punishment, and he already fancied himself in the prisons of the Inquisition. To these tormenting ideas succeeded Matilda's beauty, and those delicious lessons, which once learnt can never be forgotten. (206)

Matthew Lewis's novel, *The Monk*, joins Ricoeur's theory of *The Symbolism of evil* to a considerable extent. Through the protagonist and the other principal character, Matilda/Rosario, Lewis crafts the path of condemnation that a human being undergoes when perversity and transgression become the central aspects of his nature. Through Ambrosio's experience, transgression becomes the guiding force that shapes his self-identity and his interaction with the outer world. From the beginning of the novel, he experiences an inner struggle between the appealing urges of his body and the sacred vows he has taken. Through evocative monologues, Lewis depicts Ambrosio's yearning for the pleasures of life. After the big sermon he utters, the monk flatters himself for being highly-devoted and eloquent:

I see no one but myself possessed of such resolution. Religion cannot boast Ambrosio's equal! How powerful an effect did my discourse produce upon its auditors! How they crowded around me! How they loaded me with benedictions, and pronounced me the sole uncorrupted pillar of the church. (65)

This self-contemplation reveals that Ambrosio's real concern is with religious fame and people's appreciation. The monologue does not invoke the monk's preoccupation with devoting himself entirely to the service of God. Rather, it reflects the black spot that soils Ambrosio's soul and that drives him to his ultimate downfall. When he has achieved the goal of being highly-respected and religiously-famous, Ambrosio reflects upon his human nature and convinces himself that he can commit errors:

Am I not a man, whose nature is frail and prone to error? I must now abandon the solitude of my retreat; the fairest and noblest dames of Madrid continually present themselves at the abbey, and will use no other confessor. I must accustom my eyes to objects of temptation, and expose myself to the seduction of luxury and desire. Should I meet in that world which I am constrained to enter, some lovely female—lovely as you—Madona---! (65)

Ambrosio wishes he could meet a woman as “lovely” and seducing as the Madona. Internally, he contemplates her but does not realize that his self-consciousness is increasingly soiled and exposes him to more dangerous temptations. The desire to enjoy the pleasures of life haunts him, and this is what paves the path to defilement in the first place. Worldly pleasures produce a deep effect on Ambrosio. Therefore, they are easily introduced to his life when pride has already obscured his self-consciousness. The way Ambrosio reflects upon the tableau of the Madona shifts radically. Before being attracted to Matilda’s physical beauty, the Madona was a symbol of faith, purity, and chastity. However, the sexual fantasy he starts to experience alters his vision of feminine beauty and leads to a new language he cultivates in his interactions with the opposite sex. It becomes an embodiment of lust that he strives to satisfy in real women. In his time of solitude, Ambrosio reflects upon the picture of the Virgin Mary with a strong sexual desire that obsesses him. He wishes that “if such a creature existed, and existed but for me! Were I permitted to twine round my fingers those golden ringlets, and press with my lips the treasures of that snowy bosom!” (41) Matilda is aware that she represents the Madona in Ambrosio’s eyes. She directly declares that to the monk when she says “yes, Ambrosio, in

Matilda de Villanegas you see the original of your beloved Madona. Soon after I conceived my unfortunate passion, I formed the project of conveying to you my picture” (97). Accordingly, the theme of duality and the double image is fundamental in sharpening the characters’ corruption and fragmentation in the first place.

As informed by Ricoeur’s notion of *The Symbolism of Evil*, defilement is influenced by external factors. It is a contagion that possesses the soul and solidifies with the commitment of sin. In *The Monk*, Lewis introduces defilement in his protagonist’s lived experience mainly through thoughts before translating them into actions. When he first gets infatuated with Antonia’s beauty, Lewis describes Ambrosio’s mental state as oscillating between “sentiment of tenderness, admiration, and respect. A soft and delicious melancholy infused itself into his soul” (218). At the beginning of his transgression, Ambrosio could not define his feelings. As argued by Peter Brooks “he is unclear about the premises of morality in the post-sacred universe in which he has chosen to live. These Matilda proceeds to elucidate” (251). All he could do is liberate his impulses and express them openly to himself. Because his self-consciousness is stained with impurity, he did not realize that his thoughts are going to lead him to a zone conflicting with what the status of “The Man of Holiness” dictates. Lewis emphasizes his character’s thoughts because they foreshadow his eventual sinful acts: “His thoughts were all gentle, sad, and soothing; and the whole wide world presented him with no other object than Antonia” (218). While he yearns for sexual delight, Ambrosio wonders “what would I refuse to sacrifice, could I be released from my vows, and permitted to declare my love in the sight of earth and heaven?” (218) In the midst of obsessing over sexual gratification, sacred vows become a burden from which he needs to be “released.” When articulating these thoughts in his mind,

Ambrosio is perfectly susceptible to progress further on the path of transgression because his former values and principles are muddled. At this stage, he is haunted to such an extent by his thoughts that they need to be expressed in actions. When he has his first sexual encounter with Matilda, Ambrosio's break with the laws of the church is accentuated and placed in contrast to the pleasures he enjoys:

Intoxicated with pleasure, the monk rose from the syren's luxurious couch: he no longer reflected with shame upon his incontinence, or dreaded the vengeance of offended heaven: his only fear was lest death should rob him of enjoyments, for which his long fast had only given a keener edge to his appetite. (205)

Much like Ricoeur's theory of evil, Ambrosio's defilement shifts from a spiritual corruption to a physical corruption. The former fantasies he expresses in thoughts transform into concrete actions that reinforce his consciousness of evil. The monk enters the world of sin when he first involves himself in a sexual affair with Matilda. She represents the active agent that pulls the protagonist into perversity and corruption. Not only is she the woman who introduces Ambrosio to the world of vice, but she crafts his fragmented identity when she strongly manipulates him so that he can no longer resist her temptations. In preparing the plan for Antonia's destruction, Ambrosio realizes the gravity of the action he will accomplish. In this moment of feebleness, he could think twice about it and reject Matilda's offer. Yet, she does not let him cleanse his soul from sin and join the path of God:

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? (237)

When he hears these true words, Ambrosio can only surrender to his impurity and submit to Matilda. Even though he tried to join the space of virtue by saying "though my passions have made me deviate from her laws, I still feel in my heart an innate love of virtue" (238), he still does not firmly denounce Matilda's plan to cause Antonia's destruction. These conflicting feelings devolve from the awareness of profanity Matilda introduces him to, and which are projected in his ultimate interaction with Antonia.

Vice is already printed in his mind. It becomes the only language he articulates when he interacts with women. Ambrosio only refuses to rely on magic in the realization of his plan: "Let us drop a conversation, which excites no other sentiments than horror and disgust. I will not follow you to the sepulchre, or accept the services of your infernal agents. Antonia shall be mine, but mine by human means" (238). In her design to bring Antonia to her downfall, Matilda possesses the support of supernatural powers, such as those of witchcraft and daemons, which Ambrosio's manhood refuses to collaborate with because, as stained as he is, he does not want to involve the power of magic. In an aim to clarify Ambrosio's psychological state in the process of sin, Brooks affirms that the abbot's "refusal is motivated not by virtue but by fear; he no longer respects God, he is in terror of his vengeance" (251). The strong manipulation Matilda exercises upon the fallen monk as well as the emotional and spiritual abuse she displays are meant to pull Ambrosio further

down the circle of sin. After enjoying the pleasures of sexual activity, Ambrosio can only look for more. Grudin underlines that “his conscious surrender to sexual passion entails an unconscious surrender to uncontrollable gratuitously pernicious forces, but his progress is anything but arbitrary” (142). As suggested by Paul Ricoeur, the interrelation between the soul and the body in actions is what drives Ambrosio to satisfy his lust and to endure the fear of chastisement of which his soul subsequently reminds him. This is what makes “his progress [...] anything but arbitrary” (Grudin 142).

With her innocent soul, pure spirit, and virgin body, Antonia constitutes the perfect target for the perverse Ambrosio to gain control over after murdering her mother. Commenting upon the petrifying murder and rape scene, Christopher Stokes illustrates in “Sensationalism and Supersensibility: Eighteenth Century Literary Terror Divided” that:

A thrillingly sensuous style thus reinforces the gothic monstrosity of the scene, whereby Ambrosio descends into a gloomy crypt to rape his bound female victim after murdering his mother. Although Coleridge does not cite it, it is surely behind the review’s claim that Lewis had overstepped “the nice boundaries, beyond which terror and sympathy are deserted by the pleasurable emotions”.

(Coleridge 59; Stokes 3)

In this quotation, the author points to Lewis’s celebration of the gothic tradition when the “monstrosity of the scene” (Stokes 3) exceeds the awfulness of “terror and sympathy” (Coleridge 59) that the reader might feel. Its atrocity goes beyond the limits of these two

poles to become a source of pleasure that Ambrosio holds all along the process of defilement and sin.

Reading Ambrosio's sinful process from the perspective of Ricoeur's theory of *The Symbolism of Evil* displays Ambrosio's inability to decontaminate his soul from corruption. In explaining Ricoeur's notion of sin, he writes that "sin is the conscience recognizing that the bond between man and God, the concept of the Hebrew covenant, has been broken" (48). When Ambrosio recognizes the split between himself and God, he widens the division between himself and virtue. Together with Matilda, he plots the destruction of the innocent people around him. In raping Antonia, killing her, causing the death of Agnes, and murdering his own mother, Elvira, Ambrosio realizes that he has drowned in the vicious circle of sin. But he does not cultivate sin-consciousness yet. Driven by an insisting desire to twist his conscience of evil into actions, Lewis portrays the way Ambrosio violates Antonia's chastity:

Ambrosio no longer possessed himself: wild with desire, he clasped the blushing trembler in his arms. He fastened his lips greedily upon hers, sucked in her pure delicious breath, violated with his bold hand the treasures of her bosom, and wound around him her soft and yielding limbs. Startled, alarmed, and confused at his actions, surprise at first deprived her of the power of resistance. At length recovering herself, she strove to escape from his embrace. (233)

Ricoeur's notion of the consciousness of sin explicates that the sinned person undergoes a state of anguish and fear of the inevitable punishment of God. However, Ambrosio, at this stage of transgression, neither confesses his sins, nor attempts to cleanse his soul.

His unawareness of the gravity of the act he commits when he initiates a sexual affair with Matilda coincides with his unfair condemnation of Agnes for a sin he himself will shortly commit. Following Agnes's unveiling of her plan to flee with her lover, Ambrosio encounters for the first time his corrupted double. In fact, at the discovery of the letter's content Raymond has written to her, the monk condemns his future conduct and his evolving corrupted nature. In the speech he directs to her, it feels like he is standing opposite himself in front of a mirror and addressing accusations to his fragmented virtue.

Shall St. Clare's convent become the retreat of prostitutes? Shall I suffer the church of Christ to cherish in its bosom debauchery and shame? Unworthy wretch! Such lenity would make me your accomplice. Mercy would here be criminal. You have abandoned yourself to a seducer's lust; you have defiled the sacred habit by your impurity; and still dare you think yourself deserving my compassion? (70)

In the same way Ambrosio rejects Agnes's wrongdoing and betrayal of her divine vows, his virtuous side manifests itself and rejects his fragmented transgressive nature that he will eventually fail to contain. Agnes has been harshly convicted for violating the convent's law, but her motive of love is a noble one:

Tax me not with impurity, nor think that I have erred from the warmth of temperament. Long before I took the veil, Raymond was master of my heart: he inspired me with the purest, the most irreproachable passion, and was on the point of becoming my lawful husband. (70)

On the other hand, Ambrosio's liberation of his repressed side is only meant to resist the strict rules of the Catholic institution when his unawareness of such a motive cannot be justified. The fragmentation of his identity increasingly manipulates him, so that his duplicity with the female characters gets a gothic stamp.

Furthermore, he commits incest and murders his mother because he relies on the support of dark forces. Driven by a fierce consciousness of evil, Ambrosio can only respond subjectively to the appeals of his impulses. Even though the awfulness of his act could awaken the good that has been suppressed in him, his heart remains drawn to vice. Lewis penetrates Ambrosio's mind and depicts his mental state when the fallen monk wonders "should it but be possible!" He groaned involuntarily; 'should it but be possible, oh! What a Monster am I' " (274). At this moment, Ambrosio disregards the warnings of his conscience because he believes that it is too late to obtain forgiveness. In Ambrosio's path of defilement, Matilda accentuates his conscience of sin by her strong moral, physical, and spiritual manipulations, as well as the supernatural power she uses. While Ambrosio progresses in the process of sin, he reflects upon himself and "he now saw himself stained with the most loathed and monstrous sins, the object of universal execration, a prisoner of the Holy Office, and probably doomed to perish in tortures the most severe" (348). He, however, never attempts to seek forgiveness through confession, which is central to

salvation. Indeed, Ambrosio's only interest is to preserve an ideal public reputation and commit as many crimes as possible. When he meets Matilda and Satan at the end of the novel to finalize the plan of possessing Antonia,

the confusion of Ambrosio's mind now began to appease. He rejoiced in the fortunate issue of his adventure, and reflecting upon the virtues of the Myrtle, looked upon Antonia as already in his power. Imagination retraced to him those secret charms, betrayed to him by the Enchanted Mirror, and he waited with impatience for the approach of midnight. (245)

In Lewis's description of Ambrosio's state of mind, it is arguable that this latter embodies the sickness of heart that many philosophers who discuss the issue of human evil have underlined. . They argue that all sins and wrongdoings start from the heart. It is this bodily organ that transmits the signal for vice to be performed.

In *The Symbolism of Evil*, Ricoeur writes that "with defilement we enter into the reign of terror" (25). It is the step that the defiled person reaches as soon as he commits sinful acts. In *The Monk*, Lewis allows the reader to access Ambrosio's mind in order to grasp the deep effects that his defilement inflicts upon him. After raping the innocent Antonia, murdering her, and killing Elvira, Ambrosio enters the phase of fear and dread. At this stage in the progression of his evil acts, Ambrosio realizes that God's punishment is inevitable. His conscience subsequently awakens to draw him into the inescapable chastisement and condemnation:

He knew not how far the delusions of magic might operate upon his mind: they possibly might force him to some deed, whose commission would make the breach between himself and Heaven irreparable. In this fearful dilemma, he would have implored God's assistance, but was conscious that he had forfeited all claim to such protection. Gladly would he have returned to the abbey; but as he had passed through innumerable caverns and winding passages, the attempt of regaining the stairs was hopeless. His fate is determined; no possibility of escape presented itself. He therefore combated his apprehensions, and called every argument to his succour, which might enable him to support the trying scene with fortitude. (24)

After committing many deadly sins, Ambrosio acknowledges the awfulness of the situation in which he finds himself. He acknowledges that he has intensively defied sacred law. Worse than that, he recognizes that he cannot even ask for forgiveness. At this stage of advanced defilement, the fallen monk can predict his condemnation, which is why he reaches the stage of guilt. Yet, defilement, in his case, has so somberly stained his soul that he cannot possibly move backward. He can no longer retreat to modify his behavior. Thus, his somber soul is well-acquainted with evil to the point that even at times of guilt, his hopelessness drives him further into more defiled acts and thoughts. After feeling guilt in his progression on the path of condemnation, the fallen monk gets the worst life punishment from God, as he can no longer identify his feelings. As he undergoes all the steps of transgression, Ambrosio constantly feels drowned in sin. He can no longer escape confusion and apprehension:

He approached her with confusion painted on his countenance [...] He felt himself at once repulsed from and attracted towards her, yet could account for neither sentiment. There was something in her look which penetrated him with horror, and though his understanding was still ignorant of it, conscience pointed out to him the whole extent of his crime. (324)

In this quotation, Lewis skillfully depicts how Ambrosio's disordered state of mind vacillates between confusion at the horror of his deeds and willingness to retrieve his soul and join the path of faith. After satisfying his bodily urges and re-acknowledging the inevitability of chastisement, the fragmented identity he represents peaks. Yet, his advanced defilement makes him surrender to the forces of darkness that enact complete agency upon his being. When Antonia approaches the end of her life after being cruelly devastated, Lewis depicts the horror of the moment and emphasizes the inhuman nature of Ambrosio's acts and Matilda's influence upon him. Sexually violating women who are dying highly illustrates his fragmented psyche. By degrading everyone around him, Ambrosio the monk becomes a metaphor for spiritual loss that he cannot maintain because he is ill-experienced with the topics his sermons call for:

Antonia still resisted, and he now enforced her silence by means the most horrible and inhuman. He still grasped Matilda's danger: without allowing himself a moment's reflection! She shrieked, and sank upon the ground. The monk endeavoured to bear her away with him, but she still embraced the pillar firmly. At that instant of light approaching torches flashed upon the walls. Dreading a discovery, Ambrosio was compelled to abandon his victim, and hastily fled back to the vault, where he had left Matilda. (326)

By raping then killing her, Ambrosio tries to silence Antonia's voice by applying the cruelest means of physical pain. In so doing, Antonia's physical world is reduced to her extreme pain, which helps convey the status of torture as an embodiment of evil. Antonia's rape and then murder are Ambrosio's last attempts to fulfill his sexual desires. At this stage, he reaches the peak of defilement as he not only commits fornication, rape, and murder, but also does not intend to confess his acts. He fears discovery because he has not been in total control over his actions. Matilda's command over him has a great impact in implementing brutality in his soul. She mutates along the plot and her mutation motivates corruption in the first place, and eventually results in fragmentation.

As has been demonstrated above, Ricoeur's theory of *The Symbolism of Evil* highlights the triangular processes of defilement, as motivated by the relation of the person with the external world, followed by sin that generates fear and dread, and then guilt at the end of the procedure. *The Monk* exemplifies human deviation from good to evil. In a subtle way, it succeeds in clearly displaying the three stages of evil. As argued above, Ambrosio's defilement is motivated by the external influence of Matilda who symbolizes worldly

pleasures. After acknowledging the fragmentation of his soul as a primary punishment for the cruelty of his deeds, the fallen monk experiences guilt but can never confess his deeds and seeks forgiveness “to look upon guilt with horror, Matilda, is in itself a merit: in this respect I glory to confess myself a coward” (238). This inability to exceed the circle of evil and retrieve holiness demonstrates two things: On the one hand, it shows how Ambrosio’s consciousness of evil is profound. On the other hand, it questions Ricoeur’s description of guilt as the last step in the trail of evil as an expression of the person’s willingness to reconcile with the sacred vows. Even though Ambrosio regrets his wrongdoings, his ego does not allow him to assume the responsibility of his disobedience to the Church. His fragmented-self navigates between shame and disdain towards the atrocity of his acts, and an inability to confess his perversity in public. Instead, to soothe the pain of guilt, he puts the entire blame on Matilda, and accuses her of all the brutality he has exhibited:

Though my passions have made me deviate from her laws, I still feel in my heart an innate love of virtue. But it ill becomes you to tax me with my perjury; you who first seduced me to violate my vows; you who first roused my sleeping vices, made me feel the weight of religion’s chains, and bade me be convinced that guilt had pleasures. Yet though my principles have yielded to the force of temperament, I still have sufficient grace to shudder at sorcery, and avoid a crime so monstrous, so unpardonable! (238)

In spite of reminding himself and Matilda that “the love of virtue” still exists in his heart, Matilda’s strong manipulation versus his feebleness towards vice and physical pleasures defeat the voice of good in the monk. As planned by the forces of darkness, Ambrosio submits to evil, rapes, and assassinates Antonia, which drives him to his ultimate disaster.

**Chapter Two: The Conflicting Mechanism of
Knowledge in *The Monk* and The Role of The Body in
Power Relations**

As an Eighteenth century novel, *The Monk* did not receive appreciation as much as it was harshly criticized. For the themes it deals with, the religious hypocrisy and the sexual perversity it exposes, *The Monk* disturbs the Catholic Church's ideals and communal expectations. In a subtle way, it mingles the sublime gothic elements that are created through the effects of the graveyards, the old castles, and the gloomy nighty atmosphere of death and horror, and the power of speech through which corruption and perversity surface. In this chapter, my focus will center on the opposing mechanism of knowledge. I will analyse the dominant characters who embody the power of knowledge as both powerful and subordinate. My investigation of the role of knowledge in this chapter focuses on the central characters of Matilda and Ambrosio as the promoters of power through discourse and knowledge. The role of the primary gothic pairs in the novel, Ambrosio and Matilda, enables the dynamism of power triangulation to be limited and incomplete. However, Antonia plays a significant role in power mechanism since she is the main figure who undermines the importance of knowledge to uphold power. The absence of knowledge, in her case, causes her harm, leads to her destruction, and also pairs her with Ambrosio. Because Matilda and Ambrosio are overpowered by the ignorance of cruelty that is part of Mankind, they are ultimately ruined. This chapter concentrates on the central characters of Ambrosio and Antonia and the manner in which knowledge affects their fates. The main aspect that my analysis tackles is the occurrence of crises in their lives when knowledge and the discourse through which it is conveyed are demolished. My investigation into the role of knowledge is framed by Michel Foucault's theory of power relations. Through his approach, I will demonstrate, on the one hand, how the legitimate authority and social hierarchy drive Ambrosio to his disgrace and eventual damnation when his constructed

knowledge is informed by the discourse of falsehood and hypocrisy. On the other hand, I will demonstrate the consequences of the absence of knowledge in causing Antonia's dishonour and death when she resists hierarchical oppression. Thus, language operates as a tool that both unveils the flaws of hierarchy as well as resistance to cruelty and corruption.

Ambrosio's position in the patriarchal society

At the beginning of the novel, Lewis crafts his major character in accordance with the expectations of the Catholic institution. As a clergyman, the most eloquent of all priests and the perfect illustrative of the law of God, Ambrosio is designated by the community of Madrid as the "Man of Holiness." The status he occupies conforms to the patriarchal norms of religious superiority and masculine authority. At the onset of the book, the author portrays the monk's position in the society he religiously governs from both male and female perspectives before presenting him to the reader. When Leonella, Antonia's aunt, asks Don Christoval about the reason why such a crowd is gathered, his portrayal of the monk reflects the communal splendour and glory which could only impress the auditor with his merits:

Could you possibly be ignorant, that Ambrosio, abbot of this monastery, pronounces a sermon in this church every Thursday? All Madrid rings with his praises. As yet he has preached but thrice; but all who have heard him are so delighted with his eloquence, that it is as difficult to obtain a place at church, as at the first representation of a new comedy. His fame certainly must have reached your ears? (46)

The author uses the expression “a new comedy” ironically to foreshadow a departure from the religious codes of purity, truthfulness and virtue, as well as a breakdown with the social norms of good, respectability, and nobility. The novel is set in Eighteenth-century Madrid, most notably after the Spanish Inquisition. Taking into consideration the nature of the period in which Lewis publishes his book, the choice of the word “new” is made suitable for the mainstream movement. It is also arguable that the author starts from specific historical events to impress the reader.

In this era, the strict rules that elevate the representatives of the Catholic Church above the imperfect common man cannot be altered or questioned. Within such a rigid hierarchy, the roles of man and woman are clearly identified and sharply separated. In *The Monk*, Ambrosio embodies the power with which the male gender relates to women within the patriarchal regime. This gender boundary is articulated in Don Christoval’s description of Ambrosio’s merits. He emphasizes “the adoration [that] paid him both by young and old, by man and woman [...] 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” (46). In addition to the universal admiration Ambrosio gains, his highly-ranked position is revealed through the prioresses’ need to solely confess to him. In communicating this detail to the reader, Lewis conveys the gender superiority the man of the Church achieves and the social supremacy he exemplifies in opposition to the spoiled souls of the average people.

The Female Characters: between Objectification and Power

1.1 Antonia as the symbol of Purity and Obedience

From the first pages of the book, Antonia is introduced to the reader as a model of the typical Eighteenth-century virgin girl. Her chastity and purity are so delicate that her characteristics are only depicted to the reader indirectly. At the beginning of the book, when Antonia and her aunt, Donna Leonella, join the crowd of the Capuchin Church, Don Christoval's eyes convey the timid and pure characteristics Antonia typifies:

Her mild blue eyes seemed an (*sic*) heaven of sweetness, and the crystal in which they moved sparkled with all the brilliance of diamonds. She appeared to be scarcely fifteen; an arch smile, playing round her mouth, declared her to be possessed of liveliness, which excess of timidity at present repressed. She looked round her with a bashful glance; and whenever her eyes accidentally met Lorenzo's, she dropped them hastily upon her rosary; her cheek was immediately suffused with blushes, and she began to tell her beads; though her manner evidently showed that she knew not what she was about.(43)

Antonia's depiction is a stereotypical representation of the ideal woman whose characteristics of innocence and virtue meet the expectations of Eighteenth-century's society. Throughout the novel, Lewis uses her to convey an image of female passivity and objectification. Antonia's innocence and ignorance of the world's dangers and human

cruelty restrict her agency and limit her agency. She cannot make her own choices, and her subordination is reinforced through the absence of free choice throughout the novel. On one side, her mother, Elvira represents the protector who aims to give her the best of what destiny can offer. On the other side, her aunt, Donna Leonella, is the preserver of social etiquettes who watches her conduct and corrects her interactions with strangers:

Fye, niece! How often have I told you, that you never should interrupt a person who is speaking! When did you ever know me do such a thing? Are these your Murcian manners? Mercy on me! I shall never be able to make this girl any thing (*sic*) like a person of good breeding. (46)

In her conversation with Antonia, Leonella adopts the patriarchal ideals that restrict the female enactment of power within a set of manners she, and girls of her status, do not necessarily embody. Her being a model on which Antonia's personality is to be crafted reinforces the girl's inability to affirm her self-identity. The social restrictions represent the fixed gender barriers that society implements on young women. Antonia's delicate nature is a metaphor for the thin boundaries the female gender cannot surpass. When she meets Ambrosio, Antonia's chastity comes to the surface. The portrayal of her timidity reveals her unawareness of the malice with which he interacts with her. She is so over-protected by her mother and well-taught by her aunt that she has not learned to judge people by herself. She has been raised in Murcia, and her arrival to Madrid constitutes an abrupt plunge into a new world, one that hurts her with human wickedness, cruelty, and vice. Antonia's lack of experience is emphasized in the novel through her mother's excessive

protection. In addition, her relationship with Ambrosio highlights the degree to which the female subjectivity and passivity are related to the lack of knowledge and the limitation of language.

1.2 Antonia's Lack of Knowledge and Absence of Language

Antonia is one of the few characters in the novel who maintains a set of characteristics that are consistent throughout the course of events. During the narrative, she is depicted as gentle, innocent, and compassionate, but also as a passive young woman. Her lack of knowledge is what results in her subjugation and eventual breakdown. Readers are more sympathetic to her situation because they know that she cannot establish her own fate since her mother, prior to the climactic event, fully controls her life. Subsequently, Antonia is forced to submit to her tragic downfall caused by Ambrosio's sexual assaults. In the novel as a whole, Antonia's voice is repressed. Her identity is introduced to the reader through the other characters' perspectives. When her mother, Elvira, confronts her with her awareness of Antonia's emotions for Lorenzo, the innocent girl can only passively surrender to her mother's point of view in this regard. Her immaturity and lack of knowledge are what drive her mother to decide what is appropriate for her:

Fear not, my sweet girl! Consider me equally as your friend and parent, and apprehend no reproof from me. I have read the emotions of your bosom; you are ill skilled in concealing them, and they could not escape my attentive eye. This Lorenzo is dangerous to your repose; he has already made an impression upon your heart [...] you are poor and friendless, my Antonia; Lorenzo is the heir of the duke of Medina Celi. (191)

In this conversation, Elvira reflects on gender boundaries when she assigns her daughter to an inferior status than that which Lorenzo occupies. For her, Antonia is not only “ill skilled in concealing” her emotions for him, but also inexperienced in her interactions with strangers. When she values the incompatibility between her daughter and Lorenzo, Elvira draws the material opposition between them both. She says “you are poor and friendless, my Antonia; Lorenzo is the heir of the duke of Medina Celi” (191). Her speech highlights the young girl’s subjugation to external judgement on the one hand, and her obscured self-identity on the other. She does not get the chance to establish an identity that distinguishes her in one way or another. When Donna Leonella introduces her to the two cavaliers in the gathering of the Capuchin Church, she says “tis a young creature [...] who is totally ignorant of the world. She has been brought up in an old castle in Murcia, with no other society than her mother’s” (43). In this depiction, Leonella sheds light on Antonia’s lack of knowledge of the external world. She is ill-experienced, and completely relies on her mother to decide what is better for her.

1.3 Ambrosio's Twinning with Antonia

Throughout the novel, Antonia perpetually maintains characteristics of femininity and subordination. She symbolizes the friar's effeminate side when he mutates from being a figure of command to becoming a figure of control. The sinful nature he develops sharpens his fragmented self and deepens his feelings of self-estrangement and self-alienation. At this stage, "shame and remorse no longer tormented him. Frequent repetitions made him familiar with sin, and his bosom became proof against the stings of conscience" (212). When Ambrosio's corruption reaches its peak, his fragmentation becomes explicitly pronounced. Thus, his interaction with Antonia allows her to represent his perfect twin, since she symbolizes his bygone opposite nature. As a metaphor for fragmented virtue and morality, Ambrosio's reflection upon Antonia fills him with "mingled sentiment of tenderness, admiration, and respect...His thoughts were all gentle, sad, and soothing; and the whole wide world presented him with no other object than Antonia" (218). In this polluted environment of vice and crimes, Antonia's representation exceeds the role of the victim to become the voice of morality that the monk once learned in the monastery. She is the opposite side of his current nature and by raping, tormenting, and killing her, Ambrosio kills the voice of truth that struggled against evil within him. Metaphorically, the immoral monk "seized every means with avidity of infusing corruption into Antonia's bosom" (228). In addition to that, he snuffs out the oaths he has been once devoted to. To explore Ambrosio's confusion between the lost divinity and the growing evilness of his soul, Andriano points to the monk's convoluted state of mind after having sex with Antonia. He signals that after raping her, Ambrosio's feelings vacillate between "repulsion" and "lust" (371).

Lewis, [...] with precocious psychological insight, accounts for both the attraction is to the projected Madonna/ anima (the mirror suggesting a self-reflection); the repulsion is once again for the whore the monk's ambivalence has made of woman. (39-40)

Hence, Ambrosio's shift of perception from enjoying female beauty to rebuffing it after having the woman suggests the split of nature he exemplifies. It also conveys the author's anti-Catholicism and his critique of heterosexuality.

Lewis's use of language is outstanding in creating the gap between the characters who speak loudly to exhibit their identities and those who have repressed the right to affirm their identities. He conveys the absence of Antonia's voice when he elaborates her personality according to the other characters' vision of her. Antonia's actions are very few and her feminine traits are reinforced in the ways the male characters relate to her. At the opening of the novel, Don Christoval is attracted to Antonia because she symbolizes femininity and innocence. Her voice is timid and it reflects her personality. It "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" (40). This delicate description associates Antonia with the feminine traits of fragility and weakness and her voiceless personality sharpens her dependence on the people who control her life. Consequently, Antonia's limited language reflects her powerless nature, which facilitates the introduction of the worldly corruption into her life that will cause her unrepairable damage.

Ambrosio and Antonia's duality comes to the surface when he engages in a conversation about love. In that phase, their opposition sharpens to convey the monk's extensive distance from the path of righteousness and innocence. Ironically, Lewis tackles

the topic of love to expose Antonia's innocence and purity on the one hand, and oppose it to the monk's malice and vice on the other. When Antonia spontaneously wonders "what is it to love?" said she, repeating his question, he responds: "Oh! Yes, undoubtedly; I have loved many, many people" (231), which betrays Ambrosio's increasing lust. Violently, he wins possession of her body without being conscious of the turmoil he will bring to her life. As soon as Antonia realizes the harm imposed on her, rejection of such a violation comes to her instinctively, without her having to necessarily acknowledge the nature of his action.

It is worth underlining that Antonia's role in the novel reflects the loss of virtue and Ambrosio's broken oath. Her contrast with Ambrosio's stained nature serves skillfully to magnify the corruption that eventually leads to his fragmentation. Because Antonia functions as the mirror that projects the departed rectitude, Ambrosio's dread and pangs of remorse deepen. With Antonia, Ambrosio faces the voice of morality he has long been repressing and denying. When he allows his evil nature to take control over his conducts, his fragmented nature is explicitly exposed and the gothic nature of his twinning with Antonia is disclosed: "The impulse of desire, the stings of disappointment, the shame of detection, and the fear of being publicly unmasked, rendered his bosom a scene of the most horrible confusion" (235).

Foucault's Power Relations and Their Manifestations in *The Monk*

Throughout the novel, Lewis draws an opposition between characters who hold the power of speech and those who have a passive voice. Language is of prime importance in the effective functioning of power. Lewis's work provides a chance to examine the role of language within the mechanism of discourse, knowledge, and power. My investigation of power relations is inspired by Michel Foucault's theories because I found it useful to discuss the novel within the mechanism of "disciplinary power." This aspect is central to my investigation because it produces a common consequence of what has led the representatives of the pastoral power, as well as the oppressed characters, to their destruction. Therefore, my interpretation of Lewis's *The Monk* is structured under the light of Foucault's network of discourse, knowledge, and power. My main argument centers on the fact that the characters' oscillation between power and weakness constructs their fates in function of the knowledge's domination or diminishment. Michel Foucault frames the interconnection between discourse, knowledge, and power in his theory of power relations. Its significance lies on the fertile ground it offers in analysing the role of language in unmasking the defects of the apparently perfect people and in resisting corruption and villainy.

Michel Foucault defines power as unpossessed; it is rather dissolved in a nexus of relations. According to Foucault, power is not hierarchical. That is to say, it is not exercised over someone or something. It is rather exercised in relation to someone or something. The interference of knowledge plays a prominent role in the construction of power since it is the tool which allows power to be held. Foucault's theory highlights the close connection between knowledge and power. His philosophical approach illustrates the significance of

knowledge in the construction of power and the role of power in the acquisition of knowledge. In his theory, Foucault discusses disciplinary power as a social and political structure that imposes laws on the community to conform to the established rules of normalization. It aims at regularizing people's conducts according to communal standards and norms. The principal attempt of disciplinary power is to guarantee a form of "docility" that avoids "abnormal" behaviors. In their definition of disciplinary power, Dreyfus and Rabinow argue that it is "a form of surveillance which is internalized. With disciplinary power, each person disciplines him or herself. Disciplinary power is also one of the poles of bio-power. The basic goal of disciplinary power is to produce a person who is docile" (134-135). They link its significance to "the rise of capitalism" and point out its importance "in the policing of sexual confession" (141).

In *The Monk*, disciplinary power is embodied in the Catholic Church, whose strict rules intend to normalize and regulate the moral, as well as social, conducts of the community of Madrid. Ambrosio is the appointed representative of the disciplinary power in *The Monk*. He possesses distinctive qualifications that allow him to observe and judge the conformity of the community to the established rules of God. Through his religious discourse, he widens the deployment of power over ordinary people who choose him as their confessor. To have a better understanding of the role of discourse in the manifestation of power, it is illuminating to grasp what discourse means according to the Foucauldian perspective. In *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault affirms that:

Archeology tries to define not the thoughts, representations, images, themes, preoccupations that are concealed or revealed in discourses; but those discourses themselves, those discourses as practices obeying certain rules. (138)

That is to say, discourse functions as the medium that displays the conventional knowledge that agrees with society's rules to enable the recourse to power to take place. It is a triangular mechanism that disciplines and controls the social and religious conduct of its citizens, as demonstrated in *The Monk*.

Discourse, Knowledge and Power as a Cause of Misery in the Character of

Ambrosio

Analysing Lewis's gothic novel under the light of the Foucauldian theory of power relations necessitates a close investigation of the knowledge that enables the principal characters to exhibit power, as well as the effect and the role of sexuality in this process. I will begin my analysis in this chapter by examining the character of Ambrosio within the realm of power relations, and the way his progression into the path of transgression is affected by the knowledge he acquires as well as the pastoral power he symbolizes. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow define the pastoral power in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* as a "form of power [that] cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people's minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it" (214). If Ambrosio, in *The Monk*, represents authority in the society of Madrid, Lewis's depiction of him aims chiefly at poking fun of the Catholic institution by making

the most eloquent preacher and the purest evangelist be the one whose secrets are never exposed, and whose conscience is never understood, not even by him. Accordingly, the pastoral power in the book is diminished and reduced to a fragile system that provides a false image of sanctity and faith. At the outset, Ambrosio symbolizes the pastoral power. Yet, through the progression of events, the author unveils the reality of falseness and hypocrisy. At the beginning, much attention is paid to his persuasive speech and influential sermons to reflect the discourse of religion and the spiritual knowledge he has acquired during his years in the monastery:

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. (47)

Ambrosio's discourse elevates him above the other preachers of the monastery and above the ordinary people who are exposed to everyday temptations. His speech grants him admiration and fame because he is operating within a space of moral authority and spiritual power. Women in Madrid choose him as their confessor because he symbolizes the mediator between people and heaven. With the ability to convince and affect the community, Ambrosio establishes an authoritarian identity. "Though the monk had ceased to speak, enthusiastic silence still prevailed through the church" (48). Strongly persuasive

and influential as he is, Ambrosio manages throughout the novel to exercise power over the community and to maintain a superior status. The religious discourse Ambrosio masters receives much appreciation and admiration because it addresses the human's natural instinct for goodness. By condemning the vices of life and insisting on the urgent need to embrace the law of God, Ambrosio becomes the leading figure of the promised heaven, and his language becomes the medium to a better life, one that is not spoiled with sin. As articulated in Foucault's definition of pastoral power, the church creates distance between its value and the value of the community. It represents good and manifests its holiness through the words of God that the preacher communicates to society. Ambrosio's merits are praised when he succeeds in functioning as the translator of holiness in real life. His language enables him to occupy a superior space and to sharpen the gap between himself and the rest of the community. The monk lacks practical application of his theoretical knowledge, which subsequently results in the failed triangulation of power relations in the book because his knowledge is fake. He represents power in relation to the society of Madrid, but this specific power does not grant him eternal fame and Godly salvation at the end of the book. It rather drives him to everlasting desolation. In this sense, the fragmented virtue that Ambrosio, the man of the monastery, illustrates horrifically resonates in his interactions with the female characters. When Ambrosio's own perception of himself becomes obscure and fragmented, he subsequently commits the sin of pride through which murder, rape, sexual perversity, and religious hypocrisy are introduced in the novel. In the discussion of Ambrosio's apparent image and real identity, Syndy M. Conger affirms, in the article entitled "Confessors and Penitents in M. G. Lewis's *The Monk*," that the abbot's "virtues [are] untested and fragile, and his vices [are] only undiscovered because of his

strict observance of a self-imposed penitential seclusion'' (2). In other words, the pastoral power the monk exemplifies has repressed his true identity beneath the surface in favour of apparent virtues and moral qualities he does not truly maintain.

Before Ambrosio's fundamental life crisis takes place, the confidence that he has gained within the walls of the convent has idealized him because it produces a flawless image he, in reality, is not. Ambrosio's idealized figure is at the heart of his tragic downfall. On the one hand, he constructs a false perception of his self-identity, one that denies the fragmented corrupted nature that affirms its presence by being more susceptible to fallacy and sin. On the other hand, social admiration, once gained, does not forgive flaws and defects of behavior at a later stage. The community of Madrid perceives the abbot as the representative of God on earth, an extension of Godly merits in life. He is raised above human imperfections and "the common people therefore esteem him to be a saint" (47). Hence, Ambrosio's recourse to power through the medium of knowledge and the influence of speech displays the opposite results of worldly fame and eternal peace, which are desolation and condemnation. At the beginning of the novel, while Ambrosio is still in the process of seducing the community of Madrid with his extended religious knowledge and public speaking skills, Don Raymond realizes the effects that such fame can indulge. Not driven by doubts about Ambrosio's sincere oaths to God but rather by an awareness that Ambrosio is not a sacred creature, Don Raymond realizes that the preacher is a human being who can condemn his soul to Satan if he exposes himself to temptation. To foreshadow Ambrosio's eventual damnation, Lewis destabilizes Ambrosio's famed chastity and celebrated purity through Don Raymond's speech:

His established reputation will mark him out to seduction as an illustrious victim; novelty will give additional charms to the allurements of pleasure; and even the talents with which nature has endowed him will contribute to his ruin; by facilitating the means of obtaining his object. (50)

Lewis's narrative demonstrates the effects of Ambrosio's narcissism on his rule. As the progression of the events reveals, Ambrosio's false constructed identity is caused by the impressive knowledge he exhibits:

He was no sooner alone, than he gave free to the indulgence of his vanity. When he remembered the enthusiasm which his discourse had excited, his heart swelled with rapture ... and pride told him loudly that he was superior to the rest of his fellow-creatures. (64)

Ambrosio starts to realize the imperfection that characterizes his nature. In his moments of solitude, he reflects upon the admiration through which the community perceives him and wonders if vice can reside in his soul. The tableau of the Madonna constitutes the primary tangible object that exposes Ambrosio's corrupt identity. When the value of the Virgin Mary changes from purity to sexual fantasy in Ambrosio's eyes, the monk widens the gap between his self and holiness. Robert Kiely comments on the duality between the Madonna and Matilda that both turn out to be a projection of Ambrosio's psyche:

When it is revealed that the model for the painting has been the wanton Matilda who dressed in monk's clothing in order to be near Ambrosio, we see that the portrait is merely another disguise. Whatever Matilda really is – a witch of Satan, a figment of Ambrosio's imagination, a woman possessed by lust – art can only hint at and we can only guess. (109)

The “disguise” Kiely refers to suggests a duplicity between the object and the subject, between Ambrosio and the sacred “portrait.” His failure to associate himself with the holiness it carries and his confusion in associating himself with either virtue or evil perplexes his identity and invites the reader to “guess.”

Through his interactions with Elvira and Antonia, as well as his involvement in Agnes's destruction, Ambrosio's corrupt side overbalances the virtuous image he has cultivated. Sharing this perspective, Syndy M. Conger argues that:

It is in his relationship to these latter three penitents that Ambrosio forgets himself. The *Manual for Confessors* lists four chief duties of the confessor: spiritual father, director of souls, spiritual physician, and spiritual judge. Ambrosio makes a mockery of all those duties, his actions sometimes seeming so like satanic parodies that they both foreshadow and ensure his damnation. It is in these relationships, too, that Lewis's version of the history of sexuality in the penitential system is told: a repeated story of captivity, degradation, torture, and even destruction. (6)

In that way, the abbot overthrows the discourse of righteousness and devotion to liberate his repressed bodily urges and to follow the voice of sin. This radical shift in the monk's conduct demonstrates how Ambrosio "makes a mockery of all [the divine] duties" (6) assigned to him. Accordingly, the knowledge that the church has taught him alters from being a means of salvation to a cause of eventual desolation and misery.

Matilda's Mechanism of Power and Articulation of Knowledge

When Ambrosio discovers Matilda's true identity, she invades his life and transforms the image of purity he had constructed into an image of deceit and evil. When Rosario confesses he is actually a woman, Ambrosio's previous fantasies about the feminine beauty that he had longed for is translated into acts. In "The Monk": Matilda and The Rhetoric of Deceit," Peter Grudin points to Matilda's intricate instruments which allow her to exercise total control over Ambrosio. Her oscillation between the delicacy of femininity and the repulsion of the master conveys the complex knowledge of power she projects. Grudin asserts that:

She had tried to move the resistant Monk by attempting suicide, and had compounded pity with lust by presenting the point of her dagger to a peerless, and needlessly exposed, breasts. Thus when, before her confession, she salts its rhetorical potential with this artful strip-tease, repetition creates emphasis, and this emphasis combines with coincidence to excite our suspicions. (139)

According to Grudin, Matilda's elaborate use of rhetoric and reliance on her bodily charm convey her sophisticated "potential" to possess Ambrosio's soul and brainwash him. Through her manipulation, Ambrosio undergoes a long process of bewilderment and confusion when he faces the contradictions of his nature. Because of Matilda, the values of the church and the voice of God he used to convey in his sermons transform into their opposite, and Ambrosio can no longer locate himself on either of the two paths. Therefore, Matilda symbolizes the locus of trauma in the life of the protagonist. The course of the narrative contributes to the development of the protagonist's new identity. Applying Foucault's theory of power relations to a reading of the text enables the argument that knowledge becomes the justifiable agent of desolation and pain. Parallel to the previous narrative framework, where Ambrosio acts and speaks as the promoter of power and the mediator between God and common people, Matilda's presence disrupts the stability of pastoral power and its more influential agents in Madrid. She represents what Foucault calls, in *Discipline and Punish*, the instrument that introduces the real "deployment of power and the establishment of truth" (184). To read *The Monk* under the Foucauldian investigation of power relations necessitates the analysis of the role of knowledge in Ambrosio's life and the way it progresses from being a means of social distinction and religious peculiarity to a means of exposition of disgrace, shame, and brutality. This opposing mechanism highlights Ambrosio's contradictory nature as well as the prominent role Matilda plays in the narrative.

According to Foucault, "power is knowledge" and they both act retrospectively and simultaneously. He argues that "knowledge is the instrument of power" Because there is power in the fact of knowing: "power is everywhere" and "comes from everywhere"

(*The History of Sexuality*, 63). It is embedded and diffused in discourse and knowledge. Through this framework, my analysis is centred on Matilda's relationship with Ambrosio. Indeed, long before Matilda starts to explicitly exercise power on Ambrosio, Lewis depicts a powerful image of her in the way she teases him, manipulates his thoughts and convinces him of the plans she has prepared for him. After being a symbol of feminine charm and sexuality, Matilda's initiation of a sexual intercourse with Ambrosio introduces a new language to the latter, one to which he is not accustomed. By being torn between the religious discourse he apparently embraces and the newly discovered world of physical pleasures and bodily desires, Ambrosio gains a new understanding of the impacts of religious hypocrisy. Matilda's strong ability to convert Ambrosio's purity into immorality is manifested in her discourse. Her ability to convince Ambrosio of concealing the truth about her identity by initiating sexual desires he has never experienced before constitutes her first deployment of power. Because he accepts to keep his partner within the walls of the monastery, Ambrosio does not realize that he is condemning his soul to the Daemon or that this act constitutes a break with his spiritual oath. He becomes subjugated to female command. Even though, at first, he resists her insisting attempts to stay in the convent, he ultimately surrenders to her demonic plans and separates himself from the word of God. At the beginning of the novel, Ambrosio represents the disciplinary power that Foucault outlines as an alternative to torture. He embodies "the sensibility of the reasonable man who makes the law" (*Discipline and Punish*, 91). But after Matilda's interference with his life, he becomes the tortured character whose oscillation between being the apparent ambassador of God and the representative of the devil drives him to the ultimate punishment. The inevitable chastisement in Lewis's novel constitutes a collapse of the

established hierarchy of the Catholic Church. It restores the order and truth that are kept obscure and hidden from the society of Madrid. For that reason, Ambrosio's acquisition of knowledge is not beneficial because it is unreal and inauthentic. Rather, Matilda's corruption of his soul helps establish truth, one that causes him pain and, ultimately, torture, yet restores social justice in Madrid.

Matilda embodies the idea of truth as 'productive' and 'relative' in the novel. Michel Foucault argues that "nothing has any meaning outside of discourse" (*The Archeology of Knowledge*, 32). It is a social construction that stimulates knowledge and formulates self-identity. In other words, discourse creates knowledge which, in its turn, produces power. That is to say, social and cultural truths correspond to the needs of a specific context. They are situated in the displayed discourse's ability to become knowledge. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault states that "There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations" (27). In that way, knowledge regulates power. It is the system that fortifies the recourse to power and makes it flexible. Accordingly, since truth is relative and depends on the discourse from which it emerges, power cannot be "static." *The Monk* fits well in the triangular relation of power, knowledge, and discourse. Through Ambrosio's lived experience, the author conveys Matilda's embodiment of power. Her ability to convince him to overthrow the sacred law of the church when she reveals her feminine identity, and the skill of manipulation she possesses, enable Matilda to initiate the discourse of bodily pleasures. This new language becomes the sole means of communication that relates Ambrosio to the female gender at this stage of his life. In his article "The Monk": Matilda and the Rhetoric of Deceit," Peter

Grudin interprets the character of Matilda as a metaphor for the devil seeking to drive human beings to spiritual ruin. He reads Matilda's contribution to the breakdown of the convent's decency as emerging from more than simple sexual motives; her aim extends further, as it is to overthrow Ambrosio's moral oaths. Grudin states that:

She directs the Monk's newly aroused passions towards the conspicuously chaste Antonia. The anomalousness of Matilda's action is paralleled by the seemingly arbitrary choice of Antonia. But this choice turns out to be darkly logical: Eventually Ambrosio is forced to murder this girl's mother, Elvira, and he rapes and murders Antonia herself. Thus he unknowingly commits matricide and incest. Matilda's intrinsic role in this process, and her strange abandonment of a lover won with such labor and art, suggests that her interest is not in the man, but in his perdition. (139)

In his article, Grudin emphasizes Matilda's strong use of "rhetoric" (139) and physical seduction to drive the friar to "perdition" (139). However, my own interpretation of Matilda's role in the novel investigates her mechanism of power and the articulation of knowledge as the primary means that enables her to succeed in her attempt at causing the monk's downfall. Drawing upon Foucault's theory, Matilda stimulates Ambrosio's repressed desires through the knowledge of sexuality she introduces to him in his encounter with the female gender.

In *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and Other Writings*, Foucault states that:

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (131)

Here, Foucault questions truth as a general statement. He believes it is a product of a specific discourse that generates knowledge and enables the acquisition of power. He advocates that a social system exercises power when it spreads the values of its culture in order to promote a standard set of knowledge. Accordingly, truth is articulated in relation to the interlinked system of discourse, knowledge, and power.

Drawing upon Foucault’s statement that “the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true” (*Power/Knowledge*, 131), I argue that Matilda represents power in her ability to expose Ambrosio’s true identity and reveal the hypocritical religious faith under which he has been masked. From the moment he engages in a sexual intercourse with Matilda, command and power are no longer in Ambrosio’s possession. The need to satisfy his sexual urges takes him down a path that will lead him to condemn his soul to

Satan. When Matilda tries to convince Ambrosio to use witchcraft to possess Antonia, the gap between his conscience of virtue and evil widens, as exposed in Matilda's words:

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. (238)

The Body within Power Relations in *The Monk*

The body in Lewis's novel is central to the manifestation of the close relationship between power and knowledge. It reconfigures the patriarchal ideals of the society of Madrid and subverts the pastoral laws that the monk represents. When Matilda succeeds in manipulating Ambrosio, his body becomes the locus of trauma that translates into sexual assaults, rape, and murders. In *The Monk*, the body intervenes in the nexus of power relations to obscure the stereotypical exhibition of power in the Eighteenth Century. Under this light, my investigation of the body in Lewis's novel defers from previous scholars who tend to interpret Ambrosio as the advocate of power because he oppresses the female body. However, my reading of the perversity that frames the monk's interactions with the female characters tackles a different angle that is supported by the Foucauldian construction of sexuality within power relations. It becomes the concrete site that discloses the consistent struggle of the fragmented psyche between virtue and corruption. When Matilda initiates the discourse of carnal desire in Ambrosio's spirit, this latter puts his acquired knowledge into practice. However, he can neither achieve long-lasting pleasure nor constant stability of mind. Because the mechanism of triangulation resides between the bygone virtue and a

newly acquired knowledge of evil, it fails to grant peace to every one of the characters who navigate within the nexus of power.

Foucault argues that power has its impact on the body. When he examines power as “productive” and “prohibitive”, the importance of the body comes to the surface. Foucault’s main purpose is to investigate power in relation to the body. His philosophy proposes the fusion of power within a complex nexus. To regulate society, he holds that the recourse to power is necessary through and on the body:

The body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invent it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. (25)

Hence, the body plays a fundamental role in the network of power relations. It exceeds its tangible connotation to denote the intertwining between disciplined subjects and souls, since the body represents “the house of the soul” (*Discipline and Punish*, 30). He remarks that the body is the locus of disciplinary power because it is on the body and through the body that subjugation is inflicted with the aim of disciplining individuals.

In Ambrosio’s lived experience, the body plays a fundamental role as the medium that conveys “truth.” The abbot conforms to Foucault’s notion of power as productive as much as it is prohibitive. Through the intermediary of Matilda, Ambrosio gathers a knowledge that restricts his power and subjugates his body to manipulation. As an immediate result of Matilda’s mental authority, the so called “Man of Holiness” engages in a corrupt journey of immorality and dissipation. His subjection to the female gender

makes him display a “discursive formation” of the language of rape, murders and continuous transgressions.

Sexual perversity is the primary theme upon which Ambrosio’s and Antonia’s damnations are grounded. Strikingly, Lewis presents the two characters as twins in their physical descriptions. They represent the image of each other in the delicacy of their facial features and the depth of character these features suggest. However, throughout the course of events, the author unveils the ways in which they are different, opposite to each other, or at least, complementary to each other. The duality they represent reinforces the fragmentation of each of them, by leading to transgressions at first and to corruption at a later stage. Sexually attracted to Antonia, the friar enables his fragmented corruption to dominate the fragmented virtue he represents. His lack of experience with the discourse of faith he used to pronounce is not practically gained, and this is what paves the path to perversity and to the duality of the self.

Apart from the resemblance established in their physical depictions, Ambrosio and Antonia intertwine in the lack of experience they typify. At the beginning, Lewis prepares the reader for a mutation or a reversal of their nominated roles by presenting them as ill-experienced and “ignorant” of life’s filthiness. On the one hand, Ambrosio gives sermons, very eloquent and informative speeches, but is absolutely unqualified to utter them because he has never really dealt with human relations; he has no practical lived experience. On the other hand, Antonia is only fifteen years old, a teenager who has spent her life under the protection and the dictations of her Mother Elvira and Aunt Leonella. As uttered by Lorenzo when he first approaches Antonia during the monk’s sermons, “you are young, and just entering into life,” said he: “your heart, new to the world” (49). Similarly, “a

man who had passed the whole of his life within the walls of a convent, cannot have found the opportunity to be guilty’’ (50), but at the same time, he has been protected from never experiencing what the external world contains in terms of various temptations. This lack of experience makes them the ‘mirror image’ of each other, which in turn, serves chiefly to the evolution of Ambrosio’s fragmented-self.

In both characters’ life trajectories, Matilda constitutes the main agent whose performance contributes greatly to Ambrosio’s departure from the normative standards of the church and the social structure. With the abrupt interference of Matilda in his life, Ambrosio “[fails] to reach required standards’’ that are communally agreed upon to regulate behaviors and contain transgressions. He is drawn into a constant web of violating what his sermons advocate. Within the walls of the monastery Ambrosio has received the knowledge of discipline of every aspect of human life. Bodies, souls, acts and thoughts are regulated to conform to the standards of normativity. Nevertheless, the suppressed calls of bodily desires that Matilda awakens drive the preacher to overthrow the consistency of morality and to engage in the world of sins and vice. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault warns that:

If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power; he upsets established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom. (6)

When first admiring the tableau of the Madona, Ambrosio fantasizes about her feminine charm and longs for the possession of such a beauty in real women. His inner striving locates him in a space of transgression that has been turned into practice through sexual intercourse with Matilda. The language he identifies with no longer lies in the discourse of morality, but rather in a new one that helps him exteriorize his repressed sexual energy. At this strategic stage, a total reversal of ideals and principles occurs in the preacher's life. Matilda further nourishes his impulse to unveil his hidden sexual fantasies when she encourages and plans for Antonia's rape. In Madrid, Matilda defies then defeats "the kind of power that operates [...] to be repressive" (*The History of Sexuality*, 9). Her meticulous tactic and well-structured sexual discourse resonate with Ambrosio and lead to his various misdemeanours. The role she plays in the novel is perplexing because she typifies "the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality" (*The History of Sexuality*, 5). Her motivating speech and manipulative abilities allow "a transgression of laws, a lifting of prohibitions, an irruption of speech, a reinstating of pleasure within reality, and a whole new economy in the mechanisms of power" to take place (*The History of Sexuality*, 5).

Ambrosio's relationship with Antonia and the hypocrisy that marks his interior intentions grant him momentary pleasures but long-lasting suffering and ever-lasting pain. Motivated by the acquired knowledge of sexuality, the fallen abbot meets what Foucault underlines in his approach of sexuality within the fused mechanism of discourse, knowledge, and power. Foucault states that "acts of aggression are punished, so also, through them, is aggressivity; rape, but at the same time perversions; murders, but also drives and desires" (*Discipline and Punish*, 17). In *The Monk*, Lewis restores social justice when he condemns his protagonist to eternal punishment for the numerous crimes he has

committed. What is significant is that the Catholic Church does not participate in the punishment of its most famous abbot; the devil persecutes the monk to make him pay for following the path of malice and wrongdoing. In an attempt to examine the flaws of Catholicism addressed in gothic fictions, George Haggerty points to the correlation between sexual perversity and religious transgression. In “The Horrors of Catholicism: Religion and Sexuality in Gothic Fiction,” he suggests that sexual and religious corruption are two faces of the same coin because they both result in political oppression. He argues that:

The connection between Catholicism and bodily lust is made explicit in various ways: confessional confidence leads to sexual abuse; lust is exercised by means of devil worship; and the monastery and convent both are scenes of violence, victimization, and death. Such familiar scenes help make clear the ways in which the easy relation between Catholicism and sexual perversity has a political as well as social valence. (15)

Accordingly, Lewis’s insertion of political as well as social messages is conveyed within the smothering religious and sexual milieu of the novel’s characters:

Sexual excess and political subversion seem to go hand in hand with religious fervour. This connection is not accidental: religious fervour is sexual in its expression, and if sexuality is always already political, so is religion. The politics of religion and sexuality in the experience of gothic fiction, at least, have much in common. (15)

As such, it is worth noting that beyond crafting Ambrosio's fate, Lewis covers the necessary themes that convey all atrocities of a given society. To express the political disability of a Mediterranean country, the flaws of Catholicism must be entirely evoked. And such involvement does not eliminate sexual discourse to authenticate its horror. Through *The Monk*, Lewis dedicates a moral lesson to those in power with the aim of demonstrating the results of repressing natural human urges. As signaled by Peter Brooks, the novel's "ethics has (*sic*) implicitly come to be founded on terror rather than virtue," "God" is simply one figure in a maniacalistic daemonology" (249-63). In other words, Lewis subverts the position of power and creates a horrifically deceiving image of the Catholic institution. Ambrosio's reputation, based on a fragile foundation, could only be spoiled with falsehood. His inability to resist the worldly attractions with which Matilda teases him traps him into error because he constitutes a trivial member of the seemingly religious class. As Syndy M. Conger comments in her article "Confessors and Penitents in M.G. Lewis's *The Monk*," "his virtues untested and fragile, and his vices only undiscovered because of his strict observance of a self-imposed penitential seclusion" (2). In so being, the friar proves to be unworthy of his sacred status. The knowledge of the Church and the voice of morality he articulates are untrue facades behind which he hides feelings of a standard sinful human being. As a result, his acquisition of the religious discourse he has been selected to display causes him nothing but devastation and death.

As has been demonstrated above, knowledge in *The Monk* plays two conflicting roles. It is through knowledge that Ambrosio gains a highly-ranked status in the society of Madrid. On the one hand, before the collapse, it raises him above the population and grants him majesty and splendor. However, since the acquisition of his knowledge is not tested

and does not defeat the enemy of holiness, he is easily entrapped and his fall occurs effortlessly. Before meeting Matilda, Ambrosio did not have the chance to plunge into the temptations of life in order to be able to evaluate his virtues. His life has been doomed to be devoted to God. On the basis of the religious discourse with which the church acquaints him, he has gathered enough knowledge to be an outstanding confessor for others, but never for himself. On the other hand, through the typical character of Antonia, Lewis conveys the necessity of knowledge acquisition to be able to protect one's self from worldly dangers and to broaden one's critical spirit in order to differentiate Good from Evil. Through these two characters, along with Matilda, Lewis ironically criticizes the role of knowledge in life. His attempt is not to criticize the Catholic institution as much as he reflects on the hypocrisy that the power of knowledge can produce in any prevailing establishment. Whenever power does not establish itself on values of decency, respectability, and justice, its collapse is inevitable. Moreover, whenever it is absent because the bases of knowledge that uplift it are weak, it causes destruction. In this way, *The Monk* is an outstanding book that illustrates the prominence of power and its functioning in the system of discourse and knowledge, as experienced by the main characters of Ambrosio, Matilda, and Antonia.

**Chapter Three: Gender Confusion and the Destruction
of Hierarchy in *The Monk***

The Monk centres on the themes of horror by paying attention to murder, rape and death in order to create a gloomy atmosphere of turmoil and chaos. In this romance, sexual aggression and spiritual deviation are interlinked and strengthened through the presence of inhuman supernatural power. By using Judith Butler's gender theory, this chapter enables a compelling reading of transgenering in relation to the gothic novel's release of repressed desires. Early in the novel, Lewis presents the protagonist as undergoing a process of inspiration and fantasy while admiring the tableau of the Madonna. At first, the Madonna symbolizes religious faith and womanly virtue for Ambrosio. As the plot proceeds and after his interactions with Matilda, Ambrosio's suppressed sexual impulses come to light and he begins to interpret the Madonna's beauty differently. In this chapter, I choose to read Lewis's novel from a gender perspective because it provides an evidence of the fragmented nature of the main characters. As their sexual and religious corruption are aggravated, so are their fragmented natures explicitly exposed. Consequently, the destabilized gender identity conveys the inversion of the natural order and the corruption that overwhelms the environment of the book. In this final chapter, I argue that Matilda's transgenering has a disorienting effect on Ambrosio's evolving sexual identity, because it reveals his double image and causes the fragmentation of his identity.

Judith Butler's theory examines gender differences by arguing for the role of 'performativity' within representations of the gendered body. She notes that "acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essences of identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (*Gender Trouble*, 173). As Butler proposes, gender is an act or a fabrication; therefore, there is no divergent male and female partition.

Identity is, in fact, undergoing a constant state of change and instability. She affirms that when gender identity is inappropriately given, its relation to “humanness” must be investigated (*Undoing Gender*, 89). Furthermore, she notes that gender and sex are acquired in time through practice. Femininity and masculinity, womanhood and manhood, are not actually innate characteristics. They are, in fact, the “legacy of sedimented acts rather than a predetermined or foreclosed structure” (“Performative Acts,” 523). They are the result of the recurring rehearsal of the “doing of gender” and sexuality (521). Butler considers both gender and sexuality to be culturally and socially constructed performances. In her essay “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” she states that gender is “a corporeal style, an ‘act’, as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where ‘performative’ suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (521). For Butler, gender cannot be ideal or constant because it is acted. As the Butlerian theory emphasizes,

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *Stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that

requires a conception of gender as a constituted *social temporality*.

(*Gender Trouble*, 179)

Thus, Butler departs from the strict separation between man and woman in terms of their sexuality. She underlines that masculinity and femininity are not permanent concepts. They are, rather, culturally constructed conducts that continuously change. Since cultural codes are subject to persistent changeability, “this perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities” (*Gender Trouble*, 138). In *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, Judith Halberstam proclaims that “improperly or inadequately gendered bodies represent the limits of the human and they present a monstrous arrangement of skin, flesh, social mores, pleasures, dangers, and wounds” (141). Similar to Butler’s perspective of gender performativity, Halberstam argues that the structure of gender in a gothic novel allows for a better understanding of what is human and inhuman.

In *The Monk*, Lewis portrays Matilda as a transgendered female who pushes her identity to the edge of humanity, and whose involvement with supernatural powers helps motivate Ambrosio’s sexual and religious perversity. *The Monk* is not only a book that displays the gothic elements of horror and revulsion. It does genuinely propose a disorder of social values and a break with the established cultural codes that used to construct the characters’ relationship with each other. This disorder has been literally referred to as a “transgression” since the sixteenth century. In this context, Anthony Julius identifies

transgression as “describ[ing] disobedience of the law. It was then enlarged, first to include the violating of any rule or principle and then to embrace any departure from correct behavior” (17). Following Julius’s argument, my analysis of transgenering gets a solid ground of interpretation, especially since the character’s destabilized gender results in self-fragmentation and to the subsequent violation of the conventional norms of conduct and the “departure from correct behavior” (17).

Butler’s theory of performativity and identity has crucial implications in Lewis’s *The Monk* for the fertile gendered ground it offers. Gender confusion is a prominent theme in the novel, as characters overtly discount the codes of fixed gender. Her approach becomes mingled with society through impulses drawn by universal norms that “enforce a binary system of masculinity and femininity” (*Bodies that Matter*, 25). In “Gothic Studies,” William Brewer famously states that the society Lewis depicts in *The Monk* is disrupted by gender disorder. The disturbing rule of Matilda mainly derives from her inability to conform to a static gender identity. Throughout the novel, she wavers between features of femininity and others of masculinity. Even though her transgenering does not really challenge social hierarchies, it does uncover the inconsistent nature of gender identity which the author deliberately reports in order to express the corrupted social, religious, and psychological of the society of Madrid in that era. This is what my chapter focuses on as a way to establish a correlation between the smothering fragmented characters and the perversity that mirrors their transgenering in the novel.

From the very outset of the book, Lewis initiates the duplicity between men and women. He presents the intertwining roles the two genders play. When “the women came to show themselves, the men to see the women” (39), the narrative framework foreshadows

“the mirror image” that is at the heart of male-female interactions. Matthew Lewis typically creates his characters in a way that corresponds to gothic conventions and that classically conforms to the trend of fairy tales. On the one hand, these characters are stereotypical representations of the male and female categories. On the other hand, they help solidify the gender’s construction by attaching manhood or womanhood to its recognized forms. Accordingly, Lewis’s characters not only celebrate the gothic tradition or to demonstrate its link with fairy tales, but also suggest the importance of social and cultural implications. The male characters in the novel act as culturally stereotypical figures who carry the burden of control and authority in a cultural framework. In *The Representation of Men in the English Gothic Novel*, Kate E. Behr assumes that the gothic adaptation of flat characters and monotonous outlines in the plot constitute ways to reflect on the dogmatic and gendered apprehension implanted in the narrative of horror. Lewis’s glowing portrayals of male persistence and the exalted female apathy as an appreciated and honorable characteristic advocate the limitations and imprisonment of women in this cultural environment. Hence, men attain excessive supremacy in the society of Madrid. However, the depiction of female stereotypes is divergent in the book. *The Monk* includes the holy virgin, under the role of Antonia, the protective mother characterized in Elvira, the loving woman who sacrifices her life for the sake of love, and the vicious and cruel woman whose recourse to supernatural power enables her to realize her mischievous goals. In opposition, the men’s features are less diverse. They are either loyal to the overall laws of the Christian church and to the codes of manhood and chivalry, or unreliable and fearful. However, two characters depart from these dualities of characteristics: the hypocritical Ambrosio and the malicious Matilda.

Ambrosio's physical depiction in the first pages of the book is paralleled to that of Antonia in the sense that they both project purity and innocence. In his first description, Ambrosio symbolizes Antonia's characterization of external beauty as well as internal seriousness:

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; study and watching had entirely deprived his cheek of colour. Tranquility reigned upon his smooth unwrinkled forehead; and content, expressed upon every feature, seemed to announce the man equally unacquainted with cares and crimes. (47)

In an interesting way, Antonia represents Ambrosio's "duplicate":

The several parts of her face considered separately, many of them were far from handsome; but, when examined together, the whole was adorable. Her skin, though fair, was not entirely without freckles; her eyes were not very large, not their lashes particularly long [...]; her mild blue eyes seemed an (*sic*) heaven of sweetness, and the crystal in which they moved sparkled with all the brilliance of diamonds. (43)

As a flat character, Rosario, who is himself Matilda, is the most decent figure before he/she reveals his/her true identity to Ambrosio. He represents the duplicate of the monk

from the time he wears the veil of fakeness to the time he unmask his true identity. At the beginning of the novel, Rosario and Ambrosio respond to the cultural and religious calls of holiness and respectability before they become spiteful. In an elusive way, they represent the twinning sides of each other. In parallel to Ambrosio, Lewis introduces Rosario as a man entering the church under mysterious conditions. His background is unknown to the reader: “A sort of mystery enveloped this youth, which rendered him at once an object of interest and curiosity” (66). Their fraternal appreciation of each other seems natural when it is analysed within the logic of twinning. Their relationship deepens because they both share the interest in divinity and the rejection of worldly pleasures: as underlined by Joseph Andriano, “Rosario, so closely associated with the Madona portrait, could be an image of the youthful Ambrosio, whose desire is first hidden under a cowl, then revealed as a feminine force” (35). Yet, as the narrative progresses, their duplicity turns out to be a model of gothic twinning which brings along feelings of apprehension, estrangement, and hypocrisy. As a metaphor of their doubling, Lewis incorporates the “cowl” (66) that both hides Rosario’s face at this stage, but also masks Ambrosio’s corruption and transgression later in the book.

When Rosario starts to pave the path to reveal his true identity, apparent anxiety, fear, and distress, Ambrosio occupies the masculine status of comforting an agitated woman. To read his sincere sympathy with Rosario in conjunction with his evolving evil nature enables the gothic duplicity to be strongly grounded. “Speak to me with openness: speak to me, Rosario, and say that you will confide in me. If my aid or my pity can alleviate your distress” (79). Metaphorically, the monk addresses his sympathy with his sub-consciousness to invite her manifestations to take a position. With “openness,” he

similarly responds to the calls of his fragmented awareness of evil as exhibited later in the book.

The hypocrisy that characterizes them suggests the breakdown of society's standards for both genders. Their attractive speeches mask their true intentions and their unplanned conducts. Bearing more weight in the development of the overall plot as opposed to the other secondary characters, Ambrosio and Rosario are given more chances to execute their wishes and to convert their impulses into acts. Nevertheless, they do not form their decisions and outline their behaviors out of personal convictions. Rather, the author plays with their autonomy and puts them under the influence of society's instructions. In his disguise, Rosario never encounters any difficulty to make his fellow monks think he's a man. He never has a hard time convincing the others of the legitimacy of his false story. Lewis's aim behind this is to convey a sense of corrupt cultural norms and the inversion of the natural order in the society of Madrid. The discussion between Ambrosio and Rosario sharpens the degree of ambiguity and confusion in terms of sexuality. In an attempt to reflect the blurred categories of masculinity and femininity, the author produces an unregulated image of sexuality that emphasizes his main characters' deviating natures. "When [Ambrosio] spoke to [Rosario], he insensibly assumed a tone milder than was usual to him" (42). This reveals that their relationship with each other before Rosario reveals his true gender identity is not an interaction between two men. Lewis, brilliantly, portrays the sympathy between these characters as a way to foreshadow an eventual reversal of gender roles, one that would ultimately alter the course of the novel and the destiny of each character. Rosario's excitement to interact with Ambrosio looks like a man trying to gain a woman's appreciation, whereas his acts bear resemblance to a

woman's tenderness and sensitivity. Likewise, Ambrosio's inner drives to satisfy his desires come to light in his interaction with Rosario, a fact that he personally ignores. In this context, Judith Butler notably states that yearning for the same sex "is phantasmatic trajectory and resolution of desire" (*Bodies that Matter*, 99). Even though this does not yet suggest a kind of intimate relationship with Rosario, it still indicates that "sexuality is as much motivated by the fantasy of retrieving prohibited objects as by the desire to remain protected from the threat of punishment that such a retrieval might bring on" (*Bodies that Matter*, 100).

At the outset, the monk interacts gently with Matilda. He perceives in her the liberator of his long-suppressed impulses and the guardian of his shameful secrets and disgraceful conducts. With the discovery of Antonia's pure beauty, Ambrosio's desire for Matilda vanishes to leave room for adoration and obsession with the innocent creature who possesses no knowledge of his potential for villainy. Conversely, Matilda's previous characteristics of loyalty and softness convert into cruelty and determination to make her efforts lead to the breaking of the religious oaths. Andriano comments on her vacillation between submission and domination and states that "when revealed as female, [Matilda] begin[s] as sympathetic feminine/submissive character, but becomes dominant aggressive sorceresses" (33) when she acquires power.

The author gradually depicts the change in Matilda's personality by making her apparent love for Ambrosio be the cause of her perversity. Her wavering between feminine and masculine characteristics enables transgression and fragmentation to be rooted in Ambrosio's psyche. Andriano points out to the duplicity between Matilda and Ambrosio when he states that "As in *Le Diable amoureux*, the personification of desire within the

man is imagined to be female ... Matilda may be seen as...a part of Ambrosio's psyche'' (35).

After revealing her feminine identity, Matilda embodies a submissive role with Ambrosio when she tries to gain his compassion and sympathy:

[She] threw herself in his passage, and embraced his knees. Ambrosio strove in vain to disengage himself from her grasp. "Do not fly me!" she cried. "Leave me not abandoned to the impulse of despair! Listen, while I excuse my imprudence, while I acknowledge my sister's story to be my own! I am Matilda; you are her beloved. (80)

By pleading for Ambrosio's acceptance of the identity she unveils for the first time, Matilda embodies the feminine attributes of vulnerability and delicacy that enable her to win the monk's heart. In a similar way, Ambrosio submits to Matilda's command later on and becomes the object of her control and manipulation. This foreshadowing of an upcoming reversal of gender roles as leading to duplicity is a way to underline Ambrosio and Matilda's double image. The feminine nature she exemplifies, as well as the evolving corruption and transgression she typifies, are grounded in the monk himself all through his interactions with her and, most notably, with Antonia.

Because Matilda is introduced in the novel as bearing the masculine identity of Rosario but simultaneously being in reality a female character, Matilda best illustrates the duality of character she navigates in her interaction with Ambrosio. Brooks highlights the twinning between Matilda and Rosario as sharing the same goal of exposing Ambrosio's

corruption and framing his disjointed identity. Matilda and Rosario are “not a wholly other, but a complex of interdicted erotic desires within” the friar (258). When Rosario/Matilda employs the mask only in the presence of the other monks, he/she gradually nurtures Ambrosio’s increasingly fragmented identity. Because she decides to seduce him from the moment she confesses her love to him, Matilda deploys delicate femininity as a weapon to charm the friar:

Ambrosio was in the full vigour of manhood; he saw before him a young and beautiful woman, the preserver of his life, the adorer of his person; and whom affection for him had reduced to the brink of the grave. He sat upon her bed; his hand rested upon her bosom; her head reclined voluptuously upon his breast. Who then can wonder if he yielded to the temptation? (104)

Here, Matilda possesses the feminine traits of weakness and sensitivity whereas Ambrosio occupies the role of the dominant male character. Ambrosio’s belief that Rosario is a man leads him to build a strong bond of fraternity with him. At some point, Ambrosio considers his fellow a son, a fact that Lewis inserts to sharpen the extent to which gender disorder is significant and dangerous in the novel. When Rosario admits that he is actually a woman, feelings of confusion and disorientation emerge in Ambrosio. This confusion is further developed when Matilda confesses her passion for him:

While she spoke, a thousand opposing sentiments combated in Ambrosio's bosom. Surprise at the singularity of this adventure; confusion at her abrupt declaration; resentment at her boldness in entering the monastery; and consciousness of the austerity with which it behoved him to reply. (82)

To rescue himself from the depth of confusion and the horror of violating the monastery's laws, Ambrosio is determined to unmask Matilda's true nature to the other monks and expel her from there. However, with Matilda's great ability for argumentation, and following an incident in which Ambrosio is bitten by a poisonous snake, Matilda succeeds in convincing him to remain in his company. She sacrifices her life to rescue her beloved by sucking the poison out of his body, but in reality, her role is to repress Ambrosio's virtuous side and to bring to life his transgressive side. As she sucks the poison out of his body, "gratitude becomes the irresistible rationalization for lust. The virtuous prior breaks his vows and begins a dangerous flirtation with the dark powers," as Peter Grudin remarks (138). Matilda tells Ambrosio that she has the power to live and that she is only going to defeat death if he wants her to do so. Her manipulative speech produces a strong impact on the character of Ambrosio. As he expresses his willingness for her to remain alive, Matilda takes advantage of the monk's frailty and declares her love for him, a moment that launches their sexual perversity in the novel.

As the events progress, Matilda's traits get increasingly associated with masculinity and control. She progressively converts into a violent figure whose obsession with tempting Ambrosio oppresses him and obscures his cohesive virtuous identity. As William Brewer argues:

She resists allegiance to established gender roles and rules of behaviors. She represents sexual instability, a sexual instability that threatens not only Ambrosio's sanity, but, in as much as he is a religious leader in Madrid, the rigidly authoritarian structure of the society in which he lives. (196)

Matilda's notorious ability to violate social norms reverses the natural boundaries between men and women. "Matilda "flickers" between sexes, suggesting not a "transvestite game," as Kiely puts it (116), but a serious theme of the collapse of boundaries between subject and object, self and other – making *The Monk*, if only in part, an early example of ambiguous gothic," Joseph Andriano signals (33). Her ability to degrade the monk is only possible because she forms Ambrosio's "evil twin," one who is increasingly defined as such as he gets corrupt.

Gender and Power: Lewis, Transgendering, and Gender Perspectives

In parallel to Matilda, Ambrosio starts undergoing a process of gender reversal as his nature becomes more feminine and fragmented over the course of their relationship:

The pleasures which he had just tasted for the first time were still impressed upon his mind: his brain was bewildered, and presented a confused chaos of remorse, voluptuousness, inquietude, and fear: he looked back with regret to that peace of soul, that security of virtue [...] Conscience painted to him in glaring colours his perjury and weakness; apprehension magnified to him the horrors of punishment. (206)

The representation of gender reversal is clearly depicted in these quotations through the different ways Ambrosio used to relate to Matilda at first, and how they progress from then on. In *The Monk*, Lewis seems preoccupied with the theme of transgendering. Not only does Ambrosio undertake the process of gender confusion, but many other male characters witness the same phenomenon throughout the novel. Raymond de Las Cisternas's interaction with the Bleeding Nun, for instance, unveils his feminine qualities, such as feebleness and vulnerability:

Raymond, haunted by the Bleeding Nun, appears self-haunted even as the external reality of the ghost is asserted. He thinks it is Agnes disguised as the ghost, but when he sees the face of the animated corpse, he reacts to it as to a Gorgon and becomes “inanimate as a statue” (170) (Andriano 42)

In spite of the acquired codes of chivalry, nobility, steadfastness, and good-manners, Raymond's love for Agnes has made him a defenseless and weak man. In his exploration

of the opposition between the taught values of manhood and the paradoxical embodiment of femininity, Peter Brooks points to the influence that Raymond's father exercises in this regard. He states that "Don Raymond is charged by his father to undertake a grand tour for the observation of manners and instruction in the varying ways of the world" (254). Although his father has taught him the codes of chivalry and command, Raymond's characteristics alter in his love for Agnes from control to submission. Through a series of imperatives and the active verbs, the tone gets a serious stamp, one that is relevant to the male embodiment of power: "Examine the manners and costumes of the multitude," his father specifically commands, "enter into the cottages; and, by observing how the vassals of foreigners are treated, learn to diminish the burthens, and augment the comforts, of your own" (Lewis 108). After receiving education in being commander of events and leader of actions, Raymond de Las Cisternas becomes submissive to the destiny chosen for him by a female figure. Thus, Lewis subverts the status of power to the credit of the nun and transforms Don Raymond into a weak and helpless figure.

After Matilda introduces the ecstasy of the sexual act to Ambrosio, his fragmented virtue vanishes. When she projects vice into his conscience, she attains authority and command over Ambrosio. She acquires power to ruin her partner's reputation, for which he fears the most. Matilda's personality traits grow more violent and aggressive in her judgment of Agnes. As opposed to the universal standards of Eighteenth-century femininity that Karen Harvey reports as being "passive, passionless, and domesticated, and wholly different from men" (305), Lewis creates Matilda as a new model of female gender bearing masculine characteristics. In his discussion with Matilda about Agnes's downfall, Ambrosio condemns Matilda's rudeness and describes her conduct with him as

“cruel and unfeminine” (Lewis 200). In contrast, Ambrosio appears more tender and sympathetic towards Agnes’s tragic story: “he now felt much compassion for the unfortunate nun. ‘I design,’ said he, ‘to request an audience to the domina tomorrow, and use every means of obtaining a mitigation of her sentence’” (Lewis 209). Whereas Matilda urges him to expose Agnes to punishment because she truly deserves it “Abandon the nun to her fate. Your interfering might be dangerous, and her imprudence merits to be punished: she is unworthy to enjoy love’s pleasures, who has not wit enough to conceal them” (Lewis 209). Classically, it is the man whose personality is less sympathetic and understanding, but in her judgment of Agnes’s case, Matilda is the more antagonistic and hostile character. Her vigorous and manipulative nature allows her to subdue the easily influenced and unstable Ambrosio.

Dressing is a fundamental aspect that reveals Matilda’s gender confusion. In an attempt to describe her, Camille Paglia addresses the gender reversal she embodies. In *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*, she affirms that:

Matilda is sexually divided. She insists on retaining her male name as an erotic aid. After she seduces the monk, she oddly becomes more and more masculine instead of more feminine... Lewis implies Matilda’s gender is in flux: a self-adjusting mechanism maintains her hermaphroditism, like water seeking its own level... (266)

Indeed, her alternation between feminine and masculine dressing emphasizes her ungendered nature. To have access to the monastery, Matilda disguises herself into Rosario. After manipulating Ambrosio and engaging in sexual intercourse with him, Matilda reveals her true gender and sexual identity, which drives the monk to sexual and religious perversity. Her shifting from submissive to destructive behavior through by changing from masculine and feminine characteristics back and forth imprisons Ambrosio in a state of emotional and sexual wavering. When she, firstly, reveals her female gender to him, her language is filled with the subservient infatuation and tenderness that are typical to the feminine woman “my heart throbbed so rapturously at obtaining the marks of your friendship, as to convince me that I never should survive its loss” (Lewis 47). As the plot progresses, Matilda seems to acquire more knowledge than Ambrosio, which rises her above other women and makes her superior to her partner, whose internal confusion and spiritual disorientation facilitate Matilda’s maintenance of control and command. In his discussion of Matilda and Bionetta in *Cazotte*, Joseph Andriano highlights that “both women start as men subservient to a male master: one a page boy, the other a novice protégé. Both are loved as men, perhaps each is an image of the male protagonist’s self – the homoerotic love is really a form of narcissism” (33). Thus, the shift of control in the novel exposes Matilda’s mirror image of Ambrosio and contributes further to the corruption of his soul that her acts and speech enable.

It is worth noting that this gender reversal serves as a type of corruption and vice since it engages the support of supernatural and evil spirits. To enlarge her knowledge, Matilda turns to a degraded and dishonored source of education that is inhuman. Her reliance on supernatural means makes her “a mere device, a cog in the gothic machinery,

an agent of supernaturalism,” Andriano remarks (37). This dependence on sophisticated means makes her a more sophisticated character with a controlling nature that elevates her above the pathetic Ambrosio.

The monk’s intensive dilemma lies in the split he experiences between the status of power he is assigned to and that of subordination he is forced to represent. Because he is divided between the sacred knowledge he has acquired and the gothic twin through which he penetrates his sub-conscience, Ambrosio inconsistently performs gender roles. At the outset, he symbolizes the typical man in a patriarchal society, especially through the convincing stamp of his language and the eloquence of his voice. He maintains a forceful status of authority in Madrid and possesses a reputation as a saint, as an example of human holiness and devotion. When Matilda divulges her womanly nature, Ambrosio’s former steadfastness and persistence vanish to leave room for confusion and disorder. His trembling at the fear of discovery and humiliation reinforces his feminine nature. The monk considers himself an object at Matilda’s mercy, a feeling that subordinates him to her. In this regard, Lewis sheds light on the control that Matilda exercises upon the monk and depicts the “shame usurped her seat in his bosom” (Lewis 193). Moreover, Ambrosio’s sexual intercourse with Matilda constitutes a turning point in the development of his identity, since their first intimate relationship represents a climactic moment of his transgression from normative masculine values. Ambrosio’s violation of the spiritual codes is aggravated by the temptations Matilda’s has created in him. Because he is seduced by her beauty, carnal desires have turned him into a product of feminized gender ruled and controlled by the female extended potentials. As stated by Karen Harvey “from around 1720 ... the dominate (*sic*), hegemonic man is no longer defined by his house-holding

status and his good domestic and Christian order but by the fact that he desires and has sex only with women'' (301). Ambrosio's sexual as well as religious perversity, the chief manifestation of his violation of the spiritual codes, is not only a product of Matilda's existence but also of the profound negative effects she produces on him. At first, she embodies feminine characteristics with which she succeeds in perfectly tempting him. With religious chastity and feminine features of tenderness and affection, Matilda holds tight chains around Ambrosio's neck, so that his body cannot resist. Joseph Andriano emphasizes Matilda's seduction, which begins with Ambrosio's body to then imprison his soul. He states that:

Matilda's degeneration goes one step further – once she has Ambrosio's body, she wants his soul. It is this desire that begins to demonize her: She is no longer a woman who has sold her soul to the devil but a fiend in women's garments who becomes more and more masculine – only male demons can win men's souls. (35)

Her influence on the monk grows increasingly destructive and dangerous. On the one hand, she twists his values as she persuades him to give up his intention to rescue the unfortunate Agnes. On the other hand, she draws plans for him to seduce the innocent Antonia and elaborates her fatal end. Thus, Matilda plays the role of the commander who draws destructive tactics for Ambrosio to execute. He can no longer think for himself and decide what best suits him. Matilda's extended knowledge is emphasized in her ability to make plans and manipulate him to realize them. She acquires the power not only to reverse the values he possessed over the course of his life in the monastery, but also to brainwash him

and lead him to harm innocent people. At this point, Ambrosio cannot return to the time when he exercised control over his actions, feelings, and decisions. He understands that power is no longer in his possession and that it is too late to retrieve it. He gives up his former forceful nature and occupies the role of the subordinate and passive character. At the end of the novel, just before his ultimate devastation, he is portrayed as “spineless, weeping, and feminine” (Brewer 201). In this scene, Lewis genuinely represents gender reversal, as he depicts his protagonist in a helpless situation that is typical for a dependent woman unable to rescue herself from execution. Before meeting Matilda, Ambrosio had an eloquence that enabled him to communicate his religious faith and holiness to the community of Madrid. Yet, after her excessive influence on him, he appears powerless in his agreement with the devil. It is worth noting that Matilda’s transgending leads Ambrosio to the spitefulness of his mind and soul. His inability to remain committed to his religious vows is a result of his weak personality in the face of Matilda’s dominant nature, a nature that raises critics’ concern and interrogations. In an attempt to define her, Grudin affirms that “her nature and motives remain unsolved because she incorporates so many and such diverse figures of dark supernaturalism.” She concludes that “Matilda is a puzzle” (143). Consequently, Ambrosio stands frail before his destruction.

Gender Transgression and Transgending Aggression: More Gothic Pairs

Similar to Ambrosio and Matilda, gender confusion is also manifested through other minor characters. In his interaction with the Bleeding Nun, Raymond de Las Cisternas finds himself in a parallel dilemma to that of Ambrosio. In his attempt to escape with Agnes, he accidentally elopes with the real Bleeding Nun because Agnes was supposed to be dressed as a nun. Misguided, Raymond confesses his love for the woman

who is in reality not his beloved. He “finds himself bound to the Bleeding Nun” (Howells 71). In this scene, Raymond undergoes a similar process of disorientation and perplexity. External appearances have misled him as the nun’s clothes drive him to an erroneous judgment. He discards his habitual qualities of manhood and maturity as a result, in order to adopt the female spiritual and emotional manipulation. Raymond remains in a constant state of apprehension and subjugation until this presence is completely banished. In this way, Lewis depicts him as “breathless with fear” and “rendered impotent, paralyzed and unable to resist the Bleeding Nun’s unwelcome kisses” (Lewis 140; Brewer 203).

Similar to Ambrosio, Raymond’s life takes a different trajectory after his encounter with the transgressive nun. Likewise, gender confusion affects Raymond’s mind and leads him to lose his rational thinking. Once again, Lewis depicts the male characters of the novel as powerless and bewildered. In opposition, the female characters occupy the status of supremacy and command. Whether the nun is originally strong or it is Raymond who has given her strength by his submission, what is really significant in male and female relationships is that gender mystification paves the road for spiritual and internal perversity. In such a manner, Lewis subverts the reader’s expectations of a conventional gender reading of Agnes’s scene. When she is bravely combatting death in the convent of St Clara, in a way only men, who are supposed to acquire such a strength, could, the chivalric characteristics of her brother Lorenzo are minimized in Lewis’s depiction of him once he mourns Antonia’s death. As “she clasped her hands, and sank lifeless upon the ground ... Lorenzo, in agony, threw himself beside her. He tore his hair, beat his breast, and refused to be separated from the corpse. At length his force being exhausted, he suffered himself to be led from the vault” (328). Lewis describes the scene as the typical reaction of a

woman who is losing the man she loves. Lorenzo “tore his hair [and] beat his breast” (328), a behavior which categorizes him as a woman lamenting the loss of a person dear to her.

Gender reversal and its impact on the characters’ corruption is a prominent theme that sharpens as the plot proceeds. It is significantly marked in the depiction of Ambrosio and Matilda. From the very outset, the two characters overturn their classical gender roles. When Matilda constructs an authoritarian attitude which paves the path for her absolute control over her partner’s mind, Ambrosio finds himself inferior to her and dependent on her decisions. Before he even meets Matilda and gets manipulated by her, Ambrosio is described by other observers as ill-informed of “what consists the difference of Man and Woman” (47). With this perspective in mind, Blakemore proposes that “Lewis’s suggestively gendered language... metaphorically makes the male monk a virtuous female and quickly links him with Antonia, who notes that she is also ignorant of sexual difference” (522). In such a gender reversal of traditional roles, Matilda’s supernatural education plays a significant role. It is her reliance on inhuman powers that allows her to rise above the monk’s extended knowledge he has acquired in the monastery. Highly influenced by Matilda, Ambrosio gives up the faculty of thinking that was previously typical of him. Correspondingly, Raymond de Las Cisternas undergoes a terrifying incident with a ghost whom he thought to be his beloved. His error has led him to witness a process of gender perplexity and corruption. In this way, Matthew Lewis’s novel adheres to Judith Butler’s notion of transgendering as performative and fabricated. In fact, the author’s unfixed representation of gender roles enables a new way of considering conventional

elements that construct gender identities. Through his characters, the author violates the classical rigid set of features that form male dominance over the female subordinate nature.

Drawing upon Judith Butler's work of performativity, Matilda's indistinct sexual identity proves that identity is undoubtedly a subject of disguise and fabrication. This is particularly relevant considering that Lewis's novel is read as a semi-theatrical production, one that emphasizes the performative nature of identities constructed from "acts [and] gestures" (*Gender Trouble*, 173), which advocates a lack of assurance and belief in a singular gendered character. Lewis pays a particular attention to the subversive depiction of Matilda, whose representation oscillates between manhood and womanhood, to be ultimately unveiled as being without gender at all. Her formerly celebrated beauty turns out to be inhuman: "her exquisite proportion of features...profusion of golden hair" (Lewis 62). Here, Lewis's depiction of Matilda's charm conforms to the traditional description of femininity. Interestingly, the narrator draws a striking resemblance between the tableau of the Madonna and Matilda. By creating a parallel between her and divine beauty, Matilda's splendor is elevated to the rank of divinity. When she and Ambrosio become lovers, her beauty is highlighted in the magnificent power of her sexuality. Her "eyes were filled a delicious languor: her bosom panted: she twined her arms voluptuously around him" (Lewis 178). In her transgendering state of sublimity, she represents the undignified, which indicates the inconsistency of feminine sublimity. Furthermore, in her final appearance, she is depicted as having the look of a "wild imperious majesty" (Lewis 340). Though she appears wearing a female dress, Lewis associates her with male features wearing female clothing.

The constant transgenering Lewis represents underlines the loss of certainty and universal values in Madrid's Eighteenth century society. Armed with sublime beauty and inhuman knowledge, Matilda represents a threat to the consistency and superiority of the patriarchal ruling system that symbolizes masculinity and sacred power. To depart from this traditional representation of gender roles, Lewis places his main character in a position of chastity and feebleness as a result of Matilda's transgendered nature. As noted by Lorenzo early in the novel, "he knows not in what consists a difference of man and woman" (Lewis 11). Ambrosio's religious background produces an inner imprisonment from which he aims to break free and release his suppressed passions. To foreshadow his downfall, the author employs feminine language in his description of Ambrosio. In various situations, he is depicted as frail and horrified: "he was confused and terrified at his weakness" (Lewis 223). When he prepares himself to enter Antonia's chamber, his heart trembled and is rendered "more timid than a woman's" (Lewis 299). Likewise, when Matilda succeeds in seducing him, he is rendered an exemplary representation of disgrace and indignity that "typifies the seduced woman in Eighteenth Century novels" (Blakemore 223). Ironically, Lewis portrays Ambrosio as despoiled and perplexed in face of Matilda's power and authority. His downfall arises from his inability to exert his masculine identity in a world dominated by female command.

The Monk can be interpreted as a prominent critique of the religious Catholic convention. In the novel, Catholicism represents the subservient part of society. It seeks to divorce with the traditional rules of patriarchal authority. Hence, transgenering in Lewis's work, especially that of its central character, appears to celebrate a form of anti-Catholicism initiated in the late Eighteenth century. As a result of people's discontentment with the

domineering and corrupted monastic institution, anti-Catholicism emerges to express a new alternative in that era.

The combination of gender confusion with the oppressive atmosphere of the church is the main theme of Lewis's novel. A Freudian notion of the fragmented self has considerable ramifications for a gendered interpretation of *The Monk*. When approached from this theoretical framework, Ambrosio's ambivalent psychological state becomes informative. *The Monk* is significantly analyzed in Mario Praz' classic study *The Romantic Agony*, in which Praz points out that the Gothic tradition highlights themes of sexual as well as religious deviation, atrocity, rape, incest, and murder. Many of the critics who have provided a compelling interpretation of Ambrosio's perverse behavior have drawn upon Sigmund Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex. In her psychoanalytic reading of *The Monk*, Anne Williams describes Ambrosio as "a gothic version of Oedipus" (120) whose downfall is caused by precarious female companies, such as Matilda, who symbolizes the ungoverned female sexuality in the patriarchal society of the Eighteenth century (117). Following the same path, Wendy Jones argues that Ambrosio's perversity originates mainly from his desperate longing for maternal love: "His unknowable and secret desire for his mother haunts him throughout his life" (134). The use of Freudian theory has led to substantial interpretations of the protagonist's behavior and stimulus. In conjunction with the gendered reading of the novel and Ambrosio's yearning for the "impossible," the Freudian theory of the Oedipal conflict becomes a fertile ground of reading the protagonist's breakdown.

Brewer argues that transgendering is menacing to the upbringing of the characters as "it destabilizes the hierarchical, Catholic, positions of authority" (198). Her argument

is useful for an instructive interpretation of the novel's denouement. Power is no longer possessed by the traditional dominant part of the social system; it shifts to be maintained by the typically subordinate figure. Women and men in *The Monk* do not play conventional gender roles any longer. Lewis creates a possibility for gender reversal mainly through some of Madrid's famous figures to suggest the collapse of the rigid system of patriarchy that used to uphold its supremacy through the dominance of corrupted religious persons. Characters in the novel alternate between the male and female category. Their sexuality becomes a matter of performativity, one that departs from the previously strict social constructs.

In *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter*, Butler argues that gender constructs an individual's identity. Correspondingly, the norms that rule the formation of gender are merely cultural constructs. Thus, they can easily be altered and reversed. According to her, gender is a product of active imagination restricting the boundaries between the sexual identities of men and women: "identification with masculine feminization and feminine phallicization" (*Bodies that Matter*, 97). It is the language that determines the sexual identity of an individual and not vice versa. In this framework, Butler emphasizes that:

The body is only signifiable, only occurs as that which can be signified within language, by being marked in this second sense. This means that any recourse to the body before the symbolic can take place only within the symbolic, which seems to imply that there is no body prior to its marking. (*Bodies that Matter*, 98)

Conventional gender roles collapse because:

Men wishing both to have and to be the phallus for other men in a scene in which the phallus not only transfers between the modalities of being and having, but between partners within a volatile circuit of exchange, men wishing to "be" the phallus for a woman who "has" it, women wishing to "have it" for a man who "is" it. (*Bodies that Matter*, 103)

Butler reinforces the argument for the constructed nature of sexual identity. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler relates Foucault's examination of the relationship between the soul and the body. She comments on his statement that "the soul is the prison of the body" (*Discipline and Punish*, 30) in order to demonstrate that cultural norms and social codes regulate the body and restrict its performance. Gender, in that sense, is articulated as a construction of cultural regulations. Thus, the body becomes an intermediate of gender performativity.

At the very beginning of the novel, Lewis's momentous characterization of male authority and female fragility as a standard of virtue and chastity gives power to the male gender to exercise authority in the feudal society of Madrid. However, one of the author's central purposes is to reverse these statuses and to provide a new vision of the collapse of the ruling social structure. As the plot begins, both Ambrosio and Rosario fit in the constructed cultural and religious norms of nobility and dignity. After Rosario's revelation of his true identity, they both turn out to be vindictive and vicious. Their performed acts reveal the hypocrisy of their nature. What is intricate is that their performances do not

emerge from absolute personal determination. Rather, they are regulated by cultural standards on the one hand, and female attainment of control on the other hand. Rosario's conversation with Ambrosio when taking off the veil with which he had hidden his true gender conveys a sense of the ambiguous sexuality that Lewis intends to represent. The use of veil in *The Monk* bears a significant meaning because Rosario/ Matilda uses it as "a particular mode of alienating the monk, for [when] she finally removes the last layer of disguise that had begun with her impersonation of Rosario" she "redirect[s] Ambrosio's passions" (Grudin 140). His excitement to communicate with Ambrosio feels like a man flattering a woman. Respectively, Ambrosio's attitude towards him gradually reveals his suppressed impulses. In this context, Butler argues that homosexual desire "is a phantasmatic trajectory and resolution of desire" (*Bodies that Matter*, 99). She develops her point by announcing that "sexuality is as much motivated by the fantasy of retrieving prohibited objects as by the desire to remain protected from the threat of punishment that such a retrieval might bring on" (*Bodies that Matter*, 100). Examining Butler's approach from the psychoanalytical point of view demonstrated above helps investigate Ambrosio's passionate love for Rosario. Lewis intends to convey that sexuality exceeds all religious restrictions and cultural boundaries. It is a performative act that brings suppressed urges and desires to the surface to render the forbidden object a more desirable one:

In short (Ambrosio) loved him with all the affection of a father. He could not help sometimes indulging a desire secretly to see the face of his pupil; but his rule of self-denial extended even to curiosity, and prevented him from communicating his wishes to the youth.

(Lewis 43)

In *The Monk*, Matthew Lewis corrupts what is essential to the traditional understanding of the basic male and female characteristics. In his article “Transgendering in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*,” William Brewer explains that Lewis “destabilizes” the society of Madrid through his “reversal of gender roles” (192). In his novel, Lewis does not conform to the conventional norms that regulate gender roles. What is outstanding is that this gender disorder is applied only to the characters who play significant roles in the plot development. At the very beginning of the novel, Antonia is infatuated with Ambrosio’s holiness. Being captivated by his character, she believes herself a saint as well. Her innocence is so accentuated that her mind cannot distinguish gender difference. Genuinely, Lewis emphasizes Antonia’s unconsciousness of gender boundaries. Her aunt Leonella is the one who highlights this ignorance by admitting that her niece “does not seem to remember that there is such a thing a man in the world” and “ought to imagine everybody to be of the same sex with [herself]” (Lewis 19). This pure innocence foreshadows an eventual breakdown of the character in a society where vice and cruelty are the chief ruling features.

As has been demonstrated above, gender confusion is a significant theme in Lewis’s *The Monk*. It is an approach that the author adapts in order to convey the loss of certainty in Eighteenth-century Madrid. Through the ambivalence that characterizes the sexual and religious identity of the characters, Lewis aims to transmit the possibility for female supremacy to be achieved. Through Ambrosio and Matilda, Lewis proves that gender is, in fact, flexible and performed. It only depends on the language and the acts of its bearer. Dressing in the novel reveals how the individuals can be misled by the gender of their partners. Masculinity and femininity, based on Judith Butler’s theory of performativity, are qualities that can be acquired through time through performance. Individuals, according to

Butler and exemplified in Lewis's characters, are not born real men or women. Their approaches and feelings are the controlling factors of their true identities and these identities are only shaped by the cultural environment in which they are raised.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, my main concern was to highlight the fragmented identity of the main characters of *The Monk*. By inspecting the various dualities between characters who symbolize good and those who exemplify evil, the present thesis attempts to emphasize the interconnection between virtue and sin in human nature when means to produce social and religious conformity have to be respected. In the present thesis, the stages of human transgression are scrutinized from the first instance of defilement to the biggest instance of sin. It tackles this progression on the path of profanity with a particular interest in psychological, spiritual, and gender disorder. In such an examination, sexuality and the body operate as a locus of the interplay of power and violence. This dissertation studies the sexualized body as both performing transgression as well as inflicting violence on other characters. By investigating the ways power functions within the nexus of discourse, knowledge, and the body, this dissertation centers on discarding the status of supremacy that the religious institution tends to maintain.

The perspective on which this study is built rejects the superficial authority that unveils the true nature of patriarchal rule. With a close analysis of the character of Ambrosio, the representative of the religious institution in the novel, the present thesis undertakes an examination of the means of oppression, hypocrisy and their immediate results not only on external characters but most notably on him because he upholds it. After a close demonstration of the devolution of desire and the motifs that nourish its explicit manifestation in Ambrosio, the present study does not conclude whether he is a culprit or innocent. It rather conveys his failure to perform as a human being and to perform as a monk. It also demonstrates that his failure represents at once an instance of the loss of certainty and the patriarchal deconstructive system of rule, while also being an expression

of resistance to the oppression that has been inflicted upon him within the monastery. By arguing that the society of Madrid was disordered at the time the novel was written, this dissertation draws various parallels between the characters in terms of gender confusion in order to demonstrate the fusion between the conscience of good and that of evil. This thesis reads the villains' eventual obliteration as a metaphor for the fragmented authority of the Spanish Inquisition. Accordingly, this analysis reads Ambrosio's transgression as a metaphor for the political, the sexual, and the social oppressions that dominated the Eighteenth Century.

The narrative under examination has informed the consequences of corruption within socially and spiritually "disciplinary" systems. The first chapter focuses on the monk's development of his evil nature which occurs because he is influenced by the female characters of the Madona and then Matilda. It elaborates a distinctive analysis of the first instance of desire, its devolution, and its evacuation into violence. The phenomenological study of transgression closely explores the growth of spiritual defilement within the character of Ambrosio. To convey the influence of the female characters in the process of transgression, the first chapter reveals the duplicity between Ambrosio and the principal female characters. Such duplicities serve as tools to sharpen the social, the spiritual, and the sexual corruptions. Studying the stages of spiritual defilement in the figure of Ambrosio does not discredit a criticism of the fragility of the religious faith when it is monitored by oppression. The monk's fragmentation between virtue and corruption projects a strong archetype of the patriarchal ethics of superiority.

The second chapter, "The Conflicting Mechanism of Knowledge in *The Monk* and The Role of The Body in Power Relations," examines the double-edged nature of power.

It analyses power as intervening in discourse and knowledge to upraise its promoters and also to demolish them when it does not emerge from experience. This chapter studies Ambrosio's interactions with the female characters who symbolize the functioning and dysfunctioning of the deployment of power. Central to my analysis of power in the main characters' lives is the importance of knowledge. By focusing on the gradual destruction of Antonia and Ambrosio, the chapter demonstrates the prominent role that knowledge plays in both of their lives. Antonia's blinding innocence and Ambrosio's inexperienced pastoral knowledge allows them both to be easily manipulated and drawn to their downfall. Foucault's concepts of power, subjugation and their relation to the body are emphasized to demonstrate the disturbed functioning of authority in the novel. Framed on the fragmented virtue and the fragmented psyche of the major characters, this chapter explores the failed nexus of power relations to produce disciplined individuals.

The third chapter, "Gender Confusion and the Destruction of Hierarchy in *The Monk*," interprets the blurred distinction between the male and the female genders as revealing the extent to which the patriarchal society is corrupt. It offers a material closure to the spiritual defilement as much as to the reversal of the status of power and the dysfunctioning of knowledge with the confused gender identity of each character. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity enables a compelling reading of the spiritual, the sexual, as well as the social corruptions that overwhelm the novel's atmosphere, as it offers a conclusion to the ambivalence of the patriarchal authoritarian rule.

The Monk explores the complexity of the human conscience. Being divided between virtue and evil, the book exhibits the stages of devolution on the path of transgression. It mainly highlights the evolution of desire in human beings and represents

the circumstances under which repressed instincts break free from the oppressive ruling system. The present thesis attempts to convey the shortcomings of a rule governed by those who manifest a gap between their status and their true nature. By studying Ambrosio's lived experience in depth, this work draws a paradox between the religious/political institution and the human psyche. It negotiates supremacy and subverts the reader's expectations not only about religious representation, but also about human performance as a whole. Ambrosio fails to perform as a monk and he also fails to perform as a decent human being; this is what adds to the fragmented nature of the book. Good and Evil reside interchangeably in the novel and it makes it unique in its genre. Drawing on the intersections between virtue and immorality, I was able to broaden my knowledge on human psychology.

However, my focus on human fragmentation does not aim to marginalize possible perspectives of additional valuable analyses. *The Monk* motivates further readings of the suspense and aggression it largely contains. The academic criticisms provided about this book disregard significant issues that are worth studying. The sense of suspense and aggression in *The Monk* is all-encompassing; they are the major characteristics that attracted me to this book. The novel conveys suspenseful effects and displays aggression through Lewis's meticulous writing style, which provokes the imagination to grasp the sonorous and the visual effects of horror and aggression. Apart from the various thematic readings of the novel, Lewis's masterpiece attracts an exploration of the ways suspense and aggression operate. Interestingly, suspense is created and amplified within the three volumes with the secondary stories that tend to report on the principal framework the reader impatiently waits to know about.

The book is a relevant piece of “trash” that is very enjoyable to read. However, people tend to disregard Gothic fiction in general, which does not offer a chance to comprehend its meanings beyond horror. Through the effects of violence and suspense, the reader both witnesses the dangers of the leading institutions, universal issues that relate to Mankind, and also identifies with other people's miseries and destructions. In that way, gothic fictions, with their theatricality and plausibility, offer a chance to illuminate human consciousness about pain, its causes, how people endure it, and its repercussions. The pain and theatricality of *The Monk* are not easily duplicated, as many people have tried over the years and failed to do. With its vital elements of horror, death, and blood, it can be disdained by some people. Yet, its target straightforwardly touches upon fundamental issues of human existence, issues that are worth further considerations.

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