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## Gender on the Gothic Agenda: The Monk through a feminine lens

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# Gender on the Gothic Agenda: *The Monk* through a feminine lens

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## **ERRATUM**

Table of Contents: In the chapter “II – Conformism and Transgression,” the subtitle “(C) Matilda as the most emancipated character” is missing from the Table of Contents.

P. 8: Last paragraph: “... the gothic heroine is usually introduced as...”

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## Introduction

*In this sense, Gothic fictions enact a dialogue between the continued unquestioning use of negative images of women and an awareness that such images merely work to sustain a misogynistic patriarchal inheritance. The Gothic, then, can be used to negotiate inherited, changing, and often contradictory female identities rooted deep in the cultural imagination<sup>1</sup>.*

Gothic Literature emerges in the 1760s as a popular genre including an atmosphere of mystery and supernatural, haunted castles in pseudo-medieval setting, fantastic creatures and heroines preyed on by villains<sup>2</sup>. The pattern of a young heroine entrapped in an isolated castle chased by a dangerous masculine figure, is firstly introduced in *The Castle of Otranto* by Sir Horace Walpole in 1764, and becomes canonical in the popular representation of Gothic Literature. Later on, this depiction evolves towards the figure of the temptress, condemning women to be portrayed through these two patriarchal representations. *The Monk*, written by Matthew Gregory Lewis in 1796 recounts the fall of a Capuchin monk, Ambrosio, after succumbing to a demon portrayed by Matilda, and his unwholesome infatuation with Antonia. The subplot follows the affair between Raymond, Marquis de las Cisternas, and the nun Agnes. The story is elaborated around the actions and evolutions of these three women who represent different archetypes of femininity in the eighteenth century society. This novel is quickly censored due to its explicitness of sexuality and its challenge of the Church.

Within the context of the Age of Enlightenment and the French Revolution, *The Monk* can be aligned with this confrontation of ideas from the *Sturm und Drang* conveyed by German literature, usually considered as a proto-Romantic movement. The British society, the power of the Church, and the condition of women are challenged in the Gothic by the depiction of transgression to these rules in a gloomy atmosphere. In 1796, the advocacy of women's rights is in its very early stages as regards the depiction of women in society and in literature through two perfect opposites, the Angel of the House and the Fallen Woman. We will try to demonstrate how Matthew Gregory Lewis challenges the eighteenth-century mindset by focusing on his questioning of the traditional and stereotypical imagery of women in Gothic literature. This novel is one of the canonical Gothic romances and, therefore, has

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1 Horner, Avril, and Sue Zlosnik, ed. *Women and the Gothic, An Edinburgh Companion*. Edinburgh University Press, 2016. p. 11

2 Punter, David. "Introductory: Dimensions of Gothic", *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*. London & New York: Longman, 1996. p. 1

had a major influence on following works of fiction. Unlike a majority of Gothic novels, this story was written by a man which also questions the perception of women from a masculine focalisation.

Firstly, we will define the link between women and the Gothic by considering the origins of the genre within the medieval romance, and its evolution in a genre written “for women” in order to define the Gothic heroine via Ann Radcliffe’s *Mysteries of Udolpho*. Then, we will propose an overview of the perception of women in the eighteenth-century by recalling *The Monk*’s polemical publication and introducing *The Monk*’s female characters through the stereotypes of The Angel in the House, the nun and the Fallen Woman. Then, we will study how the transgression of the female figures of the Gothic is depicted in the novel. We will consider the presence of matriarchies in comparison with the Church as a patriarchy to focus on the presence of the supernatural as the threat of femininity via the Bleeding Nun. Then, given that the convent is the main setting of the action, the struggle between conformism and transgression is emphasised by the strong influence of religion, strongly criticised in the novel. Eventually, we will pursue the analysis with the case study of Matilda as the most emancipated female character of *The Monk*. In the final part of the analysis, we will try to justify whether or not *The Monk* can be considered as part of the Proto-Feminist movement by giving a modern vision of the work. Firstly, we will take a closer look to Ambrosio and consider the possibility of the title actually referring to a woman. *The Monk*’s influence over the characterisation of female characters in following fiction will then be studied, especially as its publication coincides with the writing of the first proto-feminist works. The implication of women becomes more important with the development of the Female Gothic<sup>3</sup> which enables an evolution of the gothic heroine as well as a questioning of the status of female writing. Finally, we will use the theories of reception to put *The Monk* in both its context of publication and its context of reading to generate another interpretation of its female characters.

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3 The Female Gothic is defined by Ellen Moers as the Gothic works written by women.

## I – Gothic and Women

Women in Gothic literature are marked by a traditional image conveyed by the first Gothic fictions<sup>4</sup> hence a necessity to make female characters become more complex in order to make the genre evolve from a subgenre of “Romance” to a proper genre with its own features.<sup>5</sup> The context of publication in the second part of the eighteenth century also influences the perception of the genre. The point in this part is to try and explain how the literary and social context and the perception of women at the time have sharpened female characters in *The Monk*. In this first part, we will focus on the link between gothic works and women, whether as authors or as characters, by evoking the inspirations of the Gothic through romances, then with the traditional depiction of the Gothic heroine before *The Monk*. Secondly, we will evoke the polemical first publication of Lewis’ work in 1796. Finally, we will present the female characters according to the two main archetypes of women at that time, the Angel of the hearth and the Fallen Angel. An archetype is a recurrent motif in art or in literature, Jung also defines it as a “primitive mental image inherited from the earliest human ancestors, and supposed to be present in the collective unconscious<sup>6</sup>.” We will also mention the specific categorisation of the nun as she is at the core of the novel and does not precisely fit in either aforesaid categories.

### A) Romance in the shade of ruins: Women in the creation of Gothic works

The Gothic can be apprehended from different perspectives when it comes to women, as they are both creators of stories and creations within their tales. After *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764, most authors of the early Gothic are women. *The Monk’s* subtitle “*a romance*”<sup>7</sup>

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4 “The Gothic genre is the heroine and the labyrinth, Emily walking around in the dark depths of the castle at night, with the unpredictable glimmer of a candle, shuddering to any suspicious sound.” Lévy, Maurice. *Le roman “gothique” anglais 1764-1824*, Paris: Albin Michel. 1995. p. vi. (our translation): “Le gothique, c’est l’héroïne et le labyrinthe, Emilie déambulant nuitamment dans les opaques entrailles à la lueur incertaine d’une chandelle, tressaillant au moindre bruit suspect.”

5 According to Maurice Lévy, medieval romance has settled the basis for Gothic literature due to a literary and artistic Middle-Age revival in the eighteenth century, therefore we may guess that the Gothic genre is inspired by the medieval romance while developing its own characteristics. (Lévy, Maurice. *Le roman “gothique” anglais 1764-1824. op. cit.* p. 76.)

6 “Archetype | Definition of Archetype in English by Oxford Dictionaries.” *Oxford Dictionaries | English*, Oxford Dictionaries. Accessed on 15 November 2018. <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/archetype>>.

7 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk - A Romance*. 1796. London: Penguin Group Edition, 1998.



might have a double-dimension. Indeed, *romance*<sup>8</sup> may both suggest a medieval type of narrative, but also, especially nowadays, love stories, and is generally associated with women from a modern perspective. The idea is also to present the traditional image of the gothic heroine before *The Monk* is published in 1796. Finally, Ann Radcliffe is a major figure in gothic literature especially with her book *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, that was the starting point for Lewis' writing of *The Monk* who wished to create a work that goes further than Radcliffe's in the depiction of terror.

## 1. The "Romance" label

Françoise Grellet defines romance as a "medieval form of narrative which relates tales of chivalry and courtly love. Its heroes [...] are idealized and the plot often contains miraculous or supernatural elements<sup>9</sup>." The genre emphasises honour, mercy and courage rather than sentiments, represented by courtly love. The eighteenth century is known as the age of the novel. During this period, this type of literature massively grows and the word *romance* goes back to its primary definition based on its etymology as a writing in vernacular language.

According to Maurice Lévy, both the words "novel" and "romance" are synonymous as "a story in which [its] episodes occur in a more or less familiar frame of experience and show manners of feeling, living and loving in an idle society that endangered virtues and longing for love are enough to distract<sup>10</sup>." Yet, the novel is favoured over the romance in the eighteenth century because of its realism and rationalism. This twist is a symptom of the change of mentalities and a withdrawal from tradition. The Enlightenment period is characterised by a search for truth, morality, rationalism and a need to be anchored in reality. All these elements are usually implicitly associated with masculinity, linking beliefs, religion, biased judgement, sensibility and emotions to the feminine. Romance and especially Gothic romance starts to be feminised through its audience from the 1790s<sup>11</sup>.

One of the reasons for the distinction between *romance* and *novel*, as words or as genres, also results from the unsuccessful attempts from numerous authors to introduce ele-

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8 "Romance | Definition of Romance in English by Oxford Dictionaries." *Oxford Dictionaries | English*, Oxford Dictionaries. Accessed on 6 November 2018. <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/romance>>.

9 Grellet, Françoise, *A Handbook of Literary Terms, Introduction au vocabulaire littéraire anglais*. 1996. Paris: Hachette Supérieur. 2013. p. 133.

10 Lévy, Maurice, *Le roman "gothique" anglais 1764-1824, op. cit.* p. 158 (our translation): "récits dont les épisodes se déroulent dans le cadre d'une expérience plus ou moins familière, et reflètent avant tout les manières de sentir, de vivre et d'aimer d'une société désœuvrée, que suffisent à distraire les dangers que court la vertu ou quelque désespoir amoureux."

11 Ellis, Markmann. *The History of Gothic Fiction*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000. p. 94.

ments of the supernatural alongside characteristics from love stories within novels. This failure dooms the *novel* to only become a window on the reality of the time: “the instrument shaped by a society only interested by its own image with no need for escape<sup>12</sup>.” The label of “romance” also becomes a sales pitch. In the preface to her novel *The School for Widows* published in 1791, Clara Reeve considers the success of the genre.

*This word, [romance], like many others, seems to have degenerated from its original meaning: and under this flimsy disguise, it has given rise to a great number of whining, maudlin stories, full of false sentiments and false delicacy calculated to excite a kind of morbid sensibility, which is to faint under every ideal distress, and every fantastical trial; which have a tendency to weaken the mind, and to deprive it of those resources which nature intended it should find within itself<sup>13</sup>.*

She is intransigent in characterising the genre as overly sentimental by distancing it from medieval values and the importance of imagination at the core of these stories. This assessment makes the link with our recent vision of the genre<sup>14</sup>.

Gothic literature is one the most feminized genre in literature as far as writers are concerned. Before the publication of *The Monk*, critics estimate a proportion of nine female authors for only one male author in the Gothic. From the 1790s to the 1820s, about fifty women are considered as Gothic authors<sup>15</sup>, among them Ann Radcliffe, Clara Reeve and Charlotte Dacre. Apart from writing fiction, Clara Reeve studies in *The Progress of Romance*<sup>16</sup>, the characteristics of the enthusiasm created by romance. Her results show that romance can only be defined in opposition to the novel. When the latter endeavours to describe everyday life, romance stimulates imagination by introducing events or features that are unlikely to happen to the reader<sup>17</sup>. Clara Reeve sums up the first definition of romance, by proposing a distinction between a romance which would be “a fictitious or true narrative [...] imaginatively recounted<sup>18</sup>”, and a story, defined as “an account of imaginary or real people and events told for entertainment<sup>19</sup>”. This distinction stresses the “unrealistic” feature of romance. She sees her

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12 Lévy, Maurice. *Le roman “gothique” anglais 1764-1824, op.cit.* p. 159 (our translation): “l’instrument forgé par une société que seule intéresse sa propre image, et qui n’éprouve aucun besoin d’évasion”

13 Reeve, Clara, *The School for Widows*. London. Vol.I. pp. v-vi.

14 “Romance | Definition of Romance in English by Oxford Dictionaries.” *Oxford Dictionaries | English*, Oxford Dictionaries. Accessed on 6 November 2018. <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/romance>>.

15 Clery, E.J., *Women’s Gothic, from Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley*. Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers. 2000. pp. 2-3.

16 Reeve, Clara. *The Progress of Romance*. 1785. Vol.I. p. 111.

17 *Ibid.*

18 “Tale | Definition of Tale in English by Oxford Dictionaries.” *Oxford Dictionaries | English*, Oxford Dictionaries. Accessed on 6 November 2018. <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/tale>>.

19 “Story | Definition of Story in English by Oxford Dictionaries.” *Oxford Dictionaries | English*, Oxford Dictionaries. Accessed on 6 November 2018. <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/story>>.

gothic novels as a way to restore the romance satirised by Miguel de Cervantes in *Don Quixote* (1605). In comparison with the rationality and flawless morality promoted by the Enlightenment, Gothic literature is characterised by twisted morals and tarnished virtues<sup>20</sup>. Womanhood is associated to it as the Gothic was supposed to corrupt their innocent minds but enables women to question their condition in society through writing.

## 2. Gothic heroines before *The Monk*

Before the publication of *The Monk*, authors of Gothic fiction, especially female authors mostly set several main archetypal female figures up, according to Diane Hoeveler in her book *Gothic Feminism*. These archetypes oscillate between two extremes of the gothic heroine, the main character in most plots, and the gothic antiheroine, the dead/undead gothic mother for example<sup>21</sup>. From *The Castle of Otranto* to *the Mysteries of Udolpho*, the focalisation goes from the villain to the gothic heroine, making her become the main protagonist of Gothic literature.

Several main features become systematic and eventually create a pattern of the gothic heroine. According to these standards<sup>22</sup>, she is preferably a young attractive virgin woman of high-birth. She is clever and gifted yet naive and oblivious. Most of the time, she is an orphan or at least, has lost her mother, replaced by a substitute, usually another relative, as Aunt Cheron in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* for example. Facing difficulty is crucial as it is the starting point of her journey and will give rhythm to the plot. At the end of her struggles, her future husband saves the gothic heroine which echoes the inheritance of the romance, with the knight braving danger to save his sweetheart.

The construction of the gothic heroine is also linked to the middle-class ideal of womanhood at the time. There is not a canonical beauty explicitly defined in the stories, however, the gothic heroine is usually introduced her as pale, blue-eyed with fair hair, which lets the reader imagine an “angelic beauty<sup>23</sup>.” As Gothic authors were mainly women, they intend to describe and write on the experiences they could have faced and the expectations they have

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20 Botting, Fred. *Gothic*. 1980. London: Routledge. 2014. p. 42.

21 Hoeveler, Diane. *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender From Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*, University Park Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998. p.4.

22 “Virgins In Distress”, Ruotolo Christine, et al. *The Gothic: Materials for Study*. 1995. Last updated 24 October 2014. Accessed 28 December 2018. <<http://mural.uv.es/maseja/The%20Gothic%20Materials%20for%20Study.html>>.

23 Wright, Angela. “Heroines in Flight: Narrating Invisibility in Women’s Gothic Writing of the Romantic Period”, in Horner, Angela and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Guide*. op. cit. 15-30. pp. 16-17.

to meet in an eighteenth century society. Thus their writings illustrate the struggles and disorders that may gravitate around them with the figure of the “villain” who usually embodies a concept such as the character of Manfred in *The Castle of Otranto* who may represent the urge to marry and ensure his lineage.

A parallel may be drawn between the gothic novel and the *bildungsroman* as the plot follows the development of the main character in society, with the difference that this progress is internalised for gothic heroines. The difference of focalisation is also important as the gothic heroine evolves in a remote place within a patriarchal society, criticised by Gothic authors by showing its tragic, deviant, even horrific aspects. Facing these aspects enables the gothic heroine to grow from a young woman to a full-grown lady. Yet this short-term emancipation is corrected at the end in order to fit society’s rules, which explains the wedding of the heroine at the end, “but these marriages are less celebrations than they are quiet acceptances of their new keepers<sup>24</sup>.”

The environment also plays an important role in the characterisation of the gothic heroine. The remote old and decayed castle or even the monastery, in the case of *The Monk*, cuts the heroine off from the rest of the world which entails the loss of her identity, as she is “separated from protective domestic structures<sup>25</sup>.” Then, her surroundings become the ideal setting for supernatural manifestations, mixed with the corruption of its inhabitants and a form of social decay in which the place is secluded and afar from the outside world and where all social taboos fell and everything can happen. Underground passages can represent the unconscious where everything that is disturbed or disturbing is hidden and repressed. The same applies to the attic if we recall *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Bronte, in which is secluded Rochester’s first wife, Bertha, who became the emblematic “mad woman in the attic.” But with the heroine striding along these corridors to escape something or someone, the underground passages also represent the heroine’s psyche trapped into a corner if she does not secure her next move quickly enough.

### 3. *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

*The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) is not the first work written and published by Ann Radcliffe. It comes after three other novels yet this one is considered as a masterpiece of

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<sup>24</sup> Hoeveler, Diane. *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender From Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*. *op. cit.* p. 36.

<sup>25</sup> Botting, Fred. *Gothic*. *op.cit.* p.58-59.

Gothic literature. This profusion of works distinguishes her from her fellows who limited their writings to only one book, making her one of the most productive authors of this period and a major influence on many others later on<sup>26</sup>.

One of her most famous adepts is Matthew Gregory Lewis, the author of *The Monk, A Romance* published in 1796. After his reading of Radcliffe's romance, he writes that apart from the extreme amount of sentiments, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is 'one of the most interesting Books that ever have been published'<sup>27</sup>. This reading is one of the triggering factors of the actual writing of *The Monk* aiming to cut out the boredom of several aspects and emphasise the depiction of violence by using horror rather than "simple" terror. Ann Radcliffe herself posthumously explains this distinction between the two in *The New Monthly Magazine* published in 1826, even if both are often synonymous in Gothic fiction:

*Terror and Horror are so far opposite that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates them [...] And where lies the difference between horror and terror, but in the uncertainty and obscurity that accompany the first respecting the dreading evil?*<sup>28</sup>

In this dialogue between Willoughton and Mr Simpson, she defines "terror" as a feeling of uneasiness and anxiety about the anticipation of something dreadful. Terror is more internalised whereas "horror" implies physical fright and revulsion, in front of something disturbing or explicitly scary, but both concepts remain subjective. Denis Mellier<sup>29</sup> distinguishes the "aesthetics of terror" from the "aesthetics of horror". Terror is based on the unknown, indirect confrontation with fear, anxiety and the prospect of fantasy. Horror is based on the presence of supernatural objects, Mellier also links it with the *Unheimlich*, the Uncanny. Both aesthetics reject the idea of a complete unknown and a possible acknowledgement of the phobia. However, he also confronts Radcliffe's distinction with Burke's as Radcliffe associates darkness with horror when Burke associates it with terror.

*The Monk's* intertextuality with *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is more intricate. Several elements from Radcliffe can be found in the plot, from an easy nod to obvious similarities. The Convent of Sainte-Claire, where Saint-Aubert and Mrs Cheron are buried, may ring a bell while reading Lewis's work, as *The Monk* is set in Madrid in the Convent of Saint-Clare as

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26 Miles, Robert. "The 1790s: the Effulgence of the Gothic", in Hogle, Jerrold E. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 41-62. p. 65.

27 Kilgour, Maggie. *The Rise of Gothic Novel*. London: Routledge, 1995. p. 142.

28 Radcliffe, Ann. "On the Supernatural in Poetry", *The New Monthly Magazine*, 1826. 145-152. Accessed 20 January 2019. <<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/gothic/radcliffe5.html>>.

29 Mellier, Denis. *L'écriture de l'excès : Fiction fantastique et poétique de la terreur*. Paris: Éditions Champion. 1999. pp. 392-393.

well. The reference is even more obvious as Nun Agnes is present in both stories. Both fall in love with a marquis then have to take the veil. The only difference concerns the characterisation of Agnes as a major character in Lewis's fiction, when Laurentina, Sister Agnes's real name, is seen rather as an auxiliary to Emily, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Her story is also similar to the Bleeding Nun's, the major ghost in *The Monk*. The relationship between Agnes and Raymond in *The Monk*'s subplot recalls in some ways Valancourt and Emily's relationship at the beginning of the book, with the difference that Agnes and Raymond plot to flee together from Agnes's duty to become a nun. Another link could be made between Count Morano and Ambrosio. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Count Morano is in love with Emily and, is supposed to marry her according to Montoni's plan, but is stopped by the instigator as he is about to become penniless. The same interdiction is seen on a different level in *The Monk*. Ambrosio, in *The Monk*, is strongly attracted to Antonia, while he knows he must not fancy her, let alone marry her because he is a monk. However unlike Montoni, he manages to kidnap Antonia by poisoning her with hemlock to bring her to the convent vault.

## **B) Reception of *The Monk***

Joseph Bell publishes the first edition of *The Monk, A Romance* on 9 March 1796 in three volumes<sup>30</sup>. Matthew Lewis publishes this first edition anonymously. The story becomes a commercial success but remains relatively unnoticed before more virulent reviews on its content in the following years. In general terms, the critics are mixed. The literary talent of its author and his ideas are praised but the theme of violence through "lust, murder, incest, and every atrocity that can disgrace human nature"<sup>31</sup>, and Lewis' youth and position, a nineteen-year-old MP, divide the literary sphere.

Thomas James Mathias is probably one of the harshest critics of the book. In 1797, the poet points out the narrator's comments on the Bible as "the Book which young Women are recommended to study; which is put into the hands of Children, able to comprehend little more than those passages of which they had better remain ignorant"<sup>32</sup> but also as "[inculcating] the first rudiments of vice, and [giving] the first alarm to the still sleeping passions."<sup>33</sup> The blasphemy is reinforced by the alteration of Antonia's copy of the Bible made by Elvira as she removes any 'improper passages' from the sacred text in order to protect her daughter's

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<sup>30</sup> Ellis, Markmann. *The History of Gothic Fiction. op. cit.* p.106.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p.223.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

innocence of mind. This act leads to the idea that the Bible has different versions and points of view according to the reader's access to the text, which suggests a discrepancy between the meaning given by the Church and the meaning offered to the reader by reading. Such variance provokes the outrage of several critics who judge it blasphemous and open to a legal action<sup>34</sup>.

With the publication of this work, Lewis's depiction of the Church, although Catholic, ridicules and discredits the religious and political power of the state especially as the author quickly becomes an MP. Therefore, the scandal caused by *The Monk*'s political criticism on public morality, when it was first published, impacted the 'horror novel' and Gothic literature. This polemic led the author to censor his book and release a fourth edition in 1797 with numerous changes, such as the removal of the passage mentioned earlier and the libertine scenes of the novel. This apprehension of criticism is echoed with Ambrosio's concern with gossip if his actions were to be known, presented as more significant than the threat of the Inquisition in *The Monk*.

Samuel T. Coleridge also praises Lewis's literary qualities and vivid imagination, the evolution of the characters, and the description of horror within the plot through the Bleeding Nun. Yet, once again, the emphasis is put on the lack of morality conveyed by the story<sup>35</sup>, as Ambrosio's final punishment does not teach a proper lesson and sexual relationships are bluntly represented. According to him, *The Monk* should definitely not be found in the chaste hands of young readers, as it could be considered as an incitation to debauchery and as morally unacceptable<sup>36</sup>, as this commentary suggests: "The Monk is a romance, which if a parent saw in the hands of a son or a daughter he might reasonably turn pale<sup>37</sup>."

Yet, this reputation contributes to create interest in a different audience, making *The Monk* a commercial success. Gothic romance usually targets a young and female readership at the time of publication. The importance of women reading novels plays a part in several satires and caricatures produced to discredit the book. For contemporaries of Lewis, "reading novels exposed women to seduction by creating 'a susceptibility of impression and a premature warmth of tender emotions<sup>38</sup>'" making the act of reading unsuitable for well brought up ladies as it would give them confidence over emotions they should not be feeling. The lack of prudishness of the book is especially pointed out in two engravings.

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34 MacLachlan, Christopher. «Introduction». *The Monk – A Romance. op.cit.* vii-xxv. p.x.

35 Ellis, Markmann. *The History of Gothic Fiction. op.cit.* p.110.

36 *Ibid.*

37 Coleridge, Samuel T. *Critical Review*. February 1797.

38 Gisborne, Thomas. *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*. London. 1797. pp. 214-216.



Image 1: James Gillray, *Tales of Wonder!* (London: H. Humphrey, 1 February 1802); British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, London.



Image 2: Williams, *Luxury or the Comforts of a Rum pford* (London: S.W. Fores, 26 February 1801); British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, London



The first one *Tales of Wonder!* by James Gillray (Image 1) stages four women sitting at the table near a burning fireplace, offended by their reading of *The Monk* for two of them. This engraving is probably the most appropriate as it mostly focuses on the mixed reactions especially in the feminine audience, a fascination coated with disgust and horror and the fireplace representing burning passion contained by good manners. The older woman is presented as a matron and supervises the reading by expressing repugnance towards the other women's reactions. This engraving might have been inspired by an anecdote saying that a woman told Lewis that '[she knows] those who have read *The Monk*, and have been so horrified and so – enchained!'<sup>39</sup>

*Luxury or the Comfort of Rum p ford* by Charles Williams (Image 2) is based on the critic that "*The Monk* could have a direct effect on passions of a woman reader<sup>40</sup>". The scene takes place in a boudoir with a fireplace, a clock with two cupids on the mantelpiece, a canvas representing the myth of Danaë which can be seen on the wall and a kitten wiggling in the foreground. This engraving represents a young woman standing in front of the fireplace, with her right hand under her skirt and her dress hiked up showing and warming her behind to the fire as she is aroused by the reading of *The Monk*, and starts to masturbate. This representation links the book to libertine literature and conveys a pornographic dimension to *The Monk*, maybe constructed through its reputation and reception by the critics rather than the actual plotlines.

The criticisms claiming amorality and blasphemy are established through the development of libertine literature and the anti-clerical and anti-aristocratic feeling introduced by the French Revolution. Lewis writes most of the story while he is on the Continent and has the opportunity to witness the French Revolution in full swing during a stay in Paris in 1791. Libertine literature is mostly developed in France and characterised by its eroticism and anti-clerical sentiment. Speaking of which, one of its most famous French authors is probably the Marquis de Sade, who also reviewed *The Monk* in 1800 as:

*'[...] superior in all respects to the strange flights of Mrs Radcliffe's brilliant imagination'. Such gothic novels, he continued, were 'the inevitable result of the revolutionary shocks which all of Europe has suffered' [...] Sade's insight, albeit without much immediate influence, suggestively read The Monk as the product of revolutionary commotion, even though it is in any conventional historical or geographical sense located in France in the 1790s<sup>41</sup>.*

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39 Ellis, Markmann. *The History of Gothic Fiction. op. cit.* p. 94.

40 *Ibid.* p. 96.

41 *Ibid.* p. 81.

The response to this type of literature varies depending on the country. In France, libertine literature is considered as pornography and distributed as philosophical works<sup>42</sup>. In England, libertine literature and radical political texts are published like any other piece of fiction according to Iain Mac Calman's researches<sup>43</sup>. Both of these responses are representative of the connection between libertine and gothic texts with political issues of late eighteenth century as attested by Markmann Ellis: "recent research has shown that the allegiance between radical politics, philosophy and obscene writing was underlined in France, and perhaps in Britain, by the booksellers<sup>44</sup>." The Enlightenment period also carries an anti-Catholic feeling as a protest of the Church and the State. Moreover, in the 1790s, some critics draw a parallel between Ambrosio's attraction towards Matilda and the yearning for freedom of the revolutionaries. Thus, erotic passages would represent the influence of the French Revolution's ideals on Lewis.

The caricature of the Church becomes a recurrent topic in this literature. Anti-clerical libertine texts emerge from the late seventeenth century and through the eighteenth century in France and in England. These works mostly depict stories involving lecherous monks and nuns in situations of voyeurism, lesbianism, or masturbation for example. The intertextuality of such fictions can be found in *The Monk*. We could mention *Venus in the Cloister* written by Abbé de Prat, published in 1683, in which Agnes is another nun, or *Therese, the Philosopher* by the Marquis d'Argens published in 1748, a pornographic novel that romanticises the case of Catherine Cariere in 1732, involving a Jesuit who actually raped her as she was in a fit similar to a trance. This event is echoed in the last chapters of the book. *The Nun* (1796) by Denis Diderot criticises excesses in convents and also uses the codes of the anti-clerical libertine literature by including an openly-lesbian mother superior. Coincidentally or not, this book was published on the same year as *The Monk*. According to Markmann Ellis, the fascination for these places is also linked to the fact that the concept of clerical life and monasteries in Post-Reformation England is unknown<sup>45</sup>. This type of literature, called 'political pornography' by Lynn Hunt<sup>46</sup>, is also a way, both in France and England, to show the hypocrisy of places and

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42 Ellis, Markmann. *The History of Gothic Fiction. op. cit.* p. 92.: "In France, in the *ancien régime* and after, in a modified form, as Robert Danton has shown, libertine works that would now be classified as pornographic circulated as part of a clandestine literature identified as 'philosophical'."

43 *Ibid.* p. 92.

44 *Ibid.* p. 81.

45 *Ibid.* p. 93.

46 Hunt, Lynn. *Invention of Pornography, 1500-1800: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity*. 1993. New York: Zone Books. p. 302.

institutions of power both in the Church and in the government by depicting their main agents as debauched and incapable of mastering their urges and feelings.

### C) A typology of the Gothic female characters

*The patriarchal position of woman is inherently uncanny; she must submit to confinement within a narrow range of acceptable roles, their very narrowness a symptom of the fear she arouses<sup>47</sup>.*

Anne Williams explains in this quotation that the perception of women in Gothic literature is linked to the perception of women in the contemporary society of the author. In the eighteenth century, women are either represented as the Angel in the House, obedient and innocent or as the Fallen Women, who sinned and is looked down by her peers. The nun is in the in-between: she does not belong to the domestic sphere but is required to follow strict moral guidelines. *The Monk* presents a large range of female characters that can be part of different categories according to their evolution within the story. This subpart will follow the typology of women in *The Monk* from the Angel in the House in the first part, the nun in the second part, and the Fallen Woman in the third part.

#### 1. The Angel of the Hearth

Thomas Gisborne publishes *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* in 1796 and *Enquiry into the Duties of Men in the Higher and Middle Classes of Society in Great Britain Resulting from Their Respective Situations, Positions, and Employments* in 1794, in which he transcribes on paper the ideology of the separate spheres between men and women that can be found in a novel: *The Angel in the House*<sup>48</sup>.

This ideology is based on the dichotomy between the private and the public within a patriarchal society in particular. The public sphere is for men, in charge of “the science of legislation, of jurisprudence, of political economy [...]”<sup>49</sup>. In comparison, women are part of the private sphere, busy attending “to the comfort of husbands, of parents, of brothers and sisters, [...] in the intercourse of domestic life<sup>50</sup>” and taking care of the early stages of education of the future generations to perpetuate this ideology. Women are also presented as the pro-

<sup>47</sup> Williams, Anne. “Wicked Women”, in Horner, Angela and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Guide*. *op.cit.* 91-106. p. 95.

<sup>48</sup> The name of the novel refers to the stereotype that already prevails at the time.

<sup>49</sup> Hoeveler, Diane. *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender From Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*. *op. cit.* p. 30.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

tectresses of virtue and reason according to Diane Hoeveler<sup>51</sup>. In addition to these values, Gisborne also points out their aptitude for ‘sprightliness and vivacity’, ‘quickness of perception’ and ‘fertility of invention<sup>52</sup>,’ most of the qualities that may be found in gothic heroines.

*The Angel in the House* is written by Coventry Patmore between 1854 and 1862 as a tribute to his wife’s perfection as a spouse and a mother. In the author’s eyes, she is the perfect bride because she is modest, caring, selfless, and supportive of her husband. By becoming a wife, a woman acquires a social and virtuous status. She is only concerned by helping her husband into becoming a better man, avoiding scandals that could deteriorate his reputation, and improvising her artistic and household skills, but these features are also applied to daughters. Bram Dijkstra refers to the Angel in the House as a “household nun<sup>53</sup>.” The Angel in the House must also be innocent by being kept from external temptations or influences as she represents a purity of spirit and body that is to be preserved until the wedding day: “The more chaste and innocent a young woman and even a wife was, the more she lived up to the ideal that is also described in the Angel in the House<sup>54</sup>.”

*The Monk* mostly focuses on unmarried women or widows. None of their husbands is part of the action nor mentioned except if they are dead. The ideal of the Angel in the House can be found under various forms in these characters, because they are more nuanced and the “Angel-like behaviour” depicted in Patmore’s writing represents an extreme. The closest to this ideal are mostly auxiliaries to the main other characters.

Elvira and Leonella along with Antonia represent Angels of the hearth through their behaviour. Leonella is chaperoning her niece when they go to church in the first chapter and takes the lead in the conversation with Don Lorenzo. Elvira is obsessed by keeping her daughter safe and pure, by keeping her home and being mistrustful towards the people who gravitate around her. This mistrust is actually perceptiveness when she faces Ambrosio and figures out his intentions, which links her to Gisborne’s conception of the perfect wife. After her death, Flora and Jacintha watch over and protect Antonia, especially when Ambrosio is around. As a result of her seclusion, Antonia appears as timid in front of men, hiding herself

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51 *Ibid.* p. 29.

52 ‘Conduct Book for Women’. *The British Library*. Accessed 7 February 2019. <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/conduct-book-for-women>>.

53 Mulvey-Roberts, Marie. “The Female Gothic Body”, in Horner, Angela and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic, An Edinburgh Companion*. *op.cit.* 106-119. p. 107.

54 Köhl, Sarah. *The Angel in the House and Fallen Women: Assigning Women Their Places in Victorian Society*. 11 July 2016. Accessed 20 January 2019. p. 8. <<https://open.conted.ox.ac.uk/resources/documents/angel-house-and-fallen-women-assigning-women-their-places-victorian-society>>.

with her veil<sup>55</sup>. She is compared to an angel, which recalls the Angel in the House: “What a Seraph’s head presented itself to his admiration!<sup>56</sup>” This simile draws her closer to the standard of innocence to such an extreme that she is ignorant of the physical differences between men and women as “[these] are not fit subjects for young Women to handle<sup>57</sup>” though Leonella reminds her that “there is such a thing as a Man in the world<sup>58</sup>.” This observation is a subtle criticism from Lewis of the figure of the sheltered Angel in the House, which makes Antonia unfit and unprepared to face the society she lives in<sup>59</sup>.

Similar auxiliaries are present around Agnes in the subplot. The Baroness of Lindenberg represents a motherly figure to Agnes and makes sure that her niece becomes a religious nun rather than a “household nun.” Dame Cunegonda, Agnes’ governess, appears as a more inflexible chaperon than Leonella is by acting as a warden. Yet, before Agnes becomes a nun, we may find elements of the Angel in the House in Agnes’s quick-wittedness in her plan of elopement with Raymond<sup>60</sup>. Yet, a tragic reminder of the consequences of their transgression can be seen in their stillborn baby at the end of the story. Marguerite, Claude’s wife, who escapes with Raymond and Theodore in the subplot, may be one of the most accurate representation of this ideal even if this character is also in-between as Baptiste raped her before marrying her. Indeed, she cares for her family, helps her husband, willingly or not.

## 2. A peculiar case of femininity: the nun

The nun intrigues because of her seclusion from the world, her devotion to religion and her faultless morality. In Gothic novels, the nun represents chastity and virtue, but also transgression through their sexualisation as “objects of erotic speculation<sup>61</sup>.” This results from the Anti-Catholicism present from the Anglican schism of 1534. This event led to the dissolution of monasteries under the reign of Henry VIII. Mary Tudor intends to re-establish a Catholic monarchy by a violent crushing of the Protestants. The threat of a Catholic return hovers

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55 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p. 14

56 *Ibid.*

57 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p. 19.

58 *Ibid.*

59 MacLachlan, Christopher. *The Monk – A Romance. op. cit.* p.xvii.

60 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* pp. 130-131.

61 Hause, Marie, “The figure of the nun and the gothic construction of femininity in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*, Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian*, and Charlotte Brontë’s *Vilette*”. 2010. Thesis. Accessed 25 January 2019. <<http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/master201019/390>>. p. 4.

over the reign of the following sovereigns reinforcing the fear of this religion, and leading to evil and hypocritical representations of Catholicism in popular opinion<sup>62</sup>.

Convents are impacted and become, in the popular imagination, the place of many type of fantasies. They are perceived as prisons where innocent young women are deprived of social life. As they are completely inaccessible, they are more eroticised by the outer world because of the ideal of chastity and the denial of sexuality they must respect. This contributes to the description of convents as lustful places due to the promiscuity offered by seclusion.

Agnes is bound by her mother's promise to take the veil, but Raymond disturbs this prospect, and when he elopes with the ghost, she is more inclined to pronounce her vows to recover from his "treason" as Sarah Lewis explains: "The convent was too often the refuge of disappointed worldliness, the grave of blasted hopes, or the prison of involuntary victims; a withering atmosphere in this which to place warm young hearts, and expect them to expand and flourish<sup>63</sup>." Yet, when Agnes reveals her pregnancy, the convent becomes a prison where she has to "serve her sentence." With the punishment of Agnes, the convent could be seen as a Magdalene Asylum<sup>64</sup>, for these institutions were managed by Catholic nuns and received women who had extramarital affairs and whose children would be put to adoption. Agnes giving birth to a stillborn baby may be seen as a reference to this, since she will not actually see her child again. Moreover, if the underground usually refers to the unconscious, Agnes's punishment serves as an example for the other nuns, by being secluding her, she is meant to be forgotten.

We can also have a look at the onomastics of the nuns' names. Agnes refers both to the Greek *hagnos* "pure," "chaste," "holy", and the Latin *agnus* "the lamb" which stresses the association with a martyr, and with Jesus, often referred to as a lamb, sacrificing himself to carry away the original sin, as Agnes who is "sacrificed" to restore the moral balance of the convent. Virginia's name comes from the Latin *virgo* "maid", "virgin" and her evolution through the story would eventually lead her to embody characteristics for The Angel in the House. Unlike Agnes, she was not supposed to become a nun but got convinced by the Prioress. She is portrayed as a caring young woman, as well as "[one] whose beauty you must of-

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Lewis, Sarah. *Woman's Mission*. John W. Parker, 1839. Accessed 8 February 2019. Google Books. <[https://books.google.fr/books?id=q\\_1OAAAAMAAJ&hl=fr&pg=PR1#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.fr/books?id=q_1OAAAAMAAJ&hl=fr&pg=PR1#v=onepage&q&f=false)> p. 70.

<sup>64</sup> A Catholic institution founded in the middle of eighteenth century in England and Ireland as refuges for fallen women and prostitutes, named after Mary Magdalene in the Bible, known as a reformed prostitute. The first one was founded in 1758 in Whitechapel, London. 'Magdalene Society | Definition of Magdalene Society in English by Oxford Dictionaries'. *Oxford Dictionaries | English*. Accessed 11 February 2019. <[https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/magdalene\\_society](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/magdalene_society)>.

ten have heard celebrated<sup>65</sup>.” She is eventually freed from her vows and marries Lorenzo. This union accentuates the image of the “household nun” but also helps to illustrate the “rescued nun syndrome” drawn out by Susan Casteras in 1981<sup>66</sup> who establishes this theory by studying paintings depicting nuns:

*The projection of romantic and latent erotic appeal into the depiction of religious maidens generated, among other side effects, what might be termed the "rescued nun syndrome." A popular fictional subject, this commonly featured secret communications with a former lover outside the high walls and a last minute reprieve with his aid from the monastic surroundings. The happy ending predictably included marriage to the deliverer or at least return to the domestic confines of home and family<sup>67</sup>.*

### 3. Fallen Angels

The second extreme in stereotypes of femininity in the eighteenth century is the Fallen Woman, “a woman who has lost her good reputation by having sex with someone before she is married<sup>68</sup>.” This label is presented as the complete opposite of The Angel in the House, as fallen women become ostracised from society. This categorisation basically applies to any woman who does not fit the traditional requirements of the bourgeoisie with an accent on extramarital affairs<sup>69</sup>. In *Advice to Unmarried Women: to Recover and Reclaim the Fallen; and to Prevent the Fall of Others, Into the Snares and Consequences of Seduction* published in 1791, contributors give advice to fallen women on how to regain their place in a respectable society, though with difficulties<sup>70</sup>. In addition, according to Diane Hoeveler, female characters in Gothic literature are very likely to get the same treatment:

*Women who did not conform to appropriately coded bourgeois norms – who reminded the reading audience of long discarded and disgraced aristocratic flaws like adultery, passion, gossip, slander, and physical violence – became themselves the targets of savage beatings throughout the works<sup>71</sup>.*

It is universally acknowledged that the adjective “fallen” refer to the fall of men from Eden, in the *Book of Genesis*. The Biblical meaning of “knowledge” referring to “carnal knowledge”, the loss of innocence, sexual innocence in this case, makes Eve the first fallen

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65 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p.300.

66 Casteras, Susan P. “Virgin Vows: The Early Victorian Artists’ Portrayal of Nuns and Novices”. *Victorian Studies*. 24.2. (1981): 157-184. p. 178. Accessed 11 February 2019.

67 *Ibid.*

68 *FALLEN WOMAN* | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary. Accessed 6 February 2019. <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fallen-woman>>.

69 Kühl, Sarah. *The Angel in the House and Fallen Women: Assigning Women Their Places in Victorian Society. op. cit.* p. 172.

70 *Ibid.* p. 176.

71 *Ibid.* p. 30.

woman for succumbing to temptation and becoming the first temptress. Thus, women who were too forward could be defined as fallen women as well, giving them almost no freedom of action without risking to sully their reputation hence the glorification of the model of the chaste and innocent Angel in the House. Barbara Caine and Glenda Sluga explain the disapprobation of fallen women as a way to establish a patriarchal authority.

*For middle-class men, seeking to establish a different basis for authority, from what had been used by the nobility, moral authority became the key issue, evident in the power exercised by a man over the nuclear or bourgeois family and in his family and in his ability to regulate women's sexuality through her protection and containment in the domestic sphere.<sup>72</sup>*

In *The Monk*, the convent materialises this containment. The place is supposed to keep single-sex groups of men and women away from temptation but it is the place from where temptation emerges. Matilda and the Bleeding Nun, along with Agnes and Antonia are more likely to be categorised as Fallen Women even if the latter is a particular case. Moreover, the alleged origin of the phrase implies that these women are active in their own downfall as they are temptresses by nature.

It may seem inaccurate to put Antonia in this category. She has an exemplary behaviour, does not cause any scandal and is protected by the other women taking care of her. However, she enters this category for a short time after Ambrosio rapes her at the end. Through this non-consensual action, she becomes a fallen woman despite herself as she literally loses her innocence. Her murder can be seen as a figuration of her “death” as a decent woman in the eyes of the middle-class society. In comparison, Agnes seems more likely to be considered a Fallen Woman for she challenges the rules established either by her relatives or by the Church by openly flirting with Raymond, planning to elope and eventually getting intimate with her lover, which causes her own downfall.

Paranormal entities rather than actual people represent the more extreme behaviours of sexual immorality in the novel. Femininity is no longer associated with defencelessness and vulnerability<sup>73</sup>. Matilda would correspond to the definition of a temptress as the embodiment of desire for Ambrosio. This character is introduced in the story as a novice monk under the identity of Rosario, whose sister, “Matilda”, committed suicide because of unrequited love. Suicide is considered, at the time, as a sin and a violation of the law<sup>74</sup>. However, she is not

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<sup>72</sup> Caine, Barbara, and Sluga, Glenda. *Gendering European History: 1780-1920*. London: A&C Black, 2002. p. 57.

<sup>73</sup> Botting, Fred. *Gothic. op.cit.* p. 11.

<sup>74</sup> Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p. 380.



presented as a Fallen Woman at the beginning so as to trigger the empathy of the reader as she is portrayed as transgressive and immoral in the rest of the novel. Her independence and influence make her a menace for the established order; she is in control of everything during and becomes Ambrosio's partner in crime rather than just a depraved mistress with a twisted mind.

The Bleeding Nun, on the other hand, is the ghost of Beatrice de las Cisternas who makes an apparition on the Fifth of May every five years at Lindenberg's castle. She was a nun who eloped with the Baron Lindenberg who made her his mistress. At the same time, she flirts with his brother with whom she plans to murder her former lover. She becomes a Fallen Woman through a lustful life of debauchery and keeps haunting Raymond. She embodies the purity of the "chaste" nun tarnished by the reality of a burning passion causing her ruin<sup>75</sup>. She foreshadows Agnes' destiny as a transgressive nun through her idea of impersonating the ghost to elope<sup>76</sup> and by replacing her by Raymond's side. Her influence can be in the similar passionate declarations from Ambrosio to Matilda and from Raymond to "Agnes":

*'Ambrosio! Oh! my Ambrosio!' sighed Matilda.  
'Thine, ever thine!' murmured the Friar, and sank upon her bosom<sup>77</sup>.*

*'Agnes!' said I while I pressed her to my bosom, Agnes! Agnes! Thou art mine! Agnes!  
Agnes! I am thine! In my veins while blood shall roll, Thou art mine! I am thine! Thine  
my body! Thine my soul<sup>78</sup>!*

These declarations resemble wedding vows replacing vows of chastity, in Ambrosio's case, and the Bleeding Nun's case. Therefore, she is also a symbol of the urge for transgression in the novel.

The literary connection between the Gothic and women is proven by the appropriation of the genre by female authors, along with the emergence of the archetype of the gothic heroine who carries the middle-class norms of the eighteenth century. The intellectual context of the Enlightenment period enabled the development of a more subversive type of literature despite divergent reactions from the readers, as exemplified by the successive publications of censored versions of *The Monk*. This novel exemplifies the female condition in the eighteenth

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75 Berthin, Christine. *Gothic Hauntings: Melancholy Crypts and Textual Ghosts*. Basingstoke New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. p. 78.

76 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk*. *op.cit.* pp. 130-131

77 *Ibid.* p. 81

78 *Ibid.* p. 136

century by presenting nuanced female characters who oscillate between The Angel of the House and the Fallen Woman. The nun is a marginal category of femininity because of her conformity to the rules and the fascination and fantasies created for the readers of the time.

## II – Conformism and Transgression

The Oxford dictionary defines conformism as the action of “conforming to accepted behaviour or established practices<sup>79</sup>”, and transgression as “an act that goes against a law, rule, or code of conduct; an offence<sup>80</sup>.” *The Monk* is structured on this constant oscillation between these opposites based on actions and decisions of the characters or the diegesis of the story. Through the overwhelming setting of the abbey, religion takes a major part in the novel. Therefore, the perception of women is biased especially by Catholic rules and the Inquisition. Firstly, we will try to see *The Monk* as a challenge of the Church as a patriarchal microcosm by introducing the feminine threat and by analysing the depiction of the masculine characters. Secondly, the influence of religion will be analysed through the representation of religion and its drifts in *The Monk* based on over-zealousness towards the respect of Church rules. Finally, the opposition between conformism and transgression will be considered through a study of the character of Matilda, through her duality between femininity and masculinity, her characterisation as a witch and the analogy with the Femme Fatale archetype.

### A) *The Monk* as a challenge of a patriarchal society

*The Monk* takes place in an abbey in Madrid run by abbot Ambrosio. He represents an important figure of authority within and outside of the convent. However, the presence of women is very important in the novel whether it is physically, at the head of various forms of matriarchies, or as ghosts, haunting these same places. Firstly, the Church is traditionally perceived as a patriarchal institution in comparison with smaller communities where women are figures of authority. Secondly, the threat of femininity will be analysed through the ghost of the Bleeding Nun in the subplot. Finally, the shallow depiction of the other male characters is important to analyse in order to understand the representation of female characters in the novel.

#### 1. The Church as a patriarchal microcosm

According to the Oxford dictionary, a patriarchal microcosm can be defined as a “community or place, or situation regarded as encapsulating in miniature the characteristics of

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79 ‘Conformist | Definition of Conformist in English by Oxford Dictionaries’. *Oxford Dictionaries | English*. Accessed 6 March 2019. <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/conformist>>.

80 ‘Transgression | Definition of Transgression in English by Oxford Dictionaries’. *Oxford Dictionaries | English*. Accessed 6 March 2019. <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/transgression>>.

something larger<sup>81</sup>” controlled by men<sup>82</sup>. The abbey creates an isolated sphere from the rest of the world by creating a singular smaller space gathering all the characteristics of a bigger community, with its own rules, authority and potential transgressions making it a microcosm that generates a claustrophobic atmosphere.

*Do not encourage the idea that the Crowd was assembled either from motives of piety or thirst of information. But very few were influenced by those reasons; and in a city where superstition reigns with such despotic sway as in Madrid, to seek for true devotion would be a fruitless attempt. The Audience now assembled in the Capuchin Church was collected by various causes, but all of them were foreign to the ostensible motive. The Women came to show themselves, the Men to see the Women: Some were attracted by curiosity to hear an Orator so celebrated; Some came because they had no better means of employing their time till the play began; Some, from being assured that it would be impossible to find places in the Church; and one half of Madrid was brought thither by expecting to meet the other half. The only persons truly anxious to hear the Preacher were a few antiquated devotees, and half a dozen rival Orators, determined to find fault with and ridicule the discourse<sup>83</sup>.*

The Capuchin Church is undoubtedly a place of worship where the parishioners pray for the salvation of their souls and listen to Ambrosio’s sermons but the place also recalls a Roman forum where the population used to meet and gather for orators’ speeches or religious celebrations. The main object of interest, Ambrosio’s homily, is a show they attend to in their free time, and this impression is emphasized by qualifying it as a “play,” the people from Madrid as “the Audience” and Ambrosio as the “orator.”

The Catholic Church is often seen as a patriarchal institution because of the absence of women in its spheres of power. The Abbey is managed by Ambrosio who consequently is the main and highest authority in the place, alongside the Prioress, his feminine equivalent in the convent. He is a fatherly figure for the nuns and the novices on a spiritual and on a social level as he makes the decision to punish Agnes. Louis de Bonald, a philosopher and politician opposed to the French revolution, developed the social sphere of family as a “smaller state,” but this idea may be applied to a convent like Ste Clare as well, which is to be thought of as “exemplary, hierarchical and political small society<sup>84</sup>.” The philosopher’s idea is based on a quotation from Genesis, in the Bible:

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81 ‘Microcosm | Definition of Microcosm in English by Oxford Dictionaries’. *Oxford Dictionaries | English*. Accessed 18 February 2019. <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/microcosm>>.

82 ‘Patriarchal | Definition of Patriarchal in English by Oxford Dictionaries’. *Oxford Dictionaries | English*. Accessed 18 February 2019. <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/patriarchal>>.

83 Lewis Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p.11.

84 Damon, Julien. ‘La pensée de... Louis de Bonald (1754-1840)’. *Informations sociales*, 1222. 2005. p.25. (our translation).

*[It] calls man the reason, the head, the power of woman: Vir caput est mulieris {man is head of woman} says St Paul. It calls woman the helper or minister of man: 'Let us make man,' says Genesis, 'a helper similar to him.' It calls the child a subject, since it tells it, in a thousand places, to obey its parents". (On Divorce pp. 44–46)<sup>85</sup>*

This interpretation may be applied to *The Monk* with Ambrosio as “the reason, the head and the power of woman” especially as he is “a model of virtue, and piety, and learning, and I know not what else besides<sup>86</sup>,” in other words, the authority of the community and by extension “the father” as mentioned earlier. The Prioress represents the mother as a “helper” and the nuns and novices become the “children” under Ambrosio’s paternal authority:

*The Church was also organised as a patriarchal family – priests were ‘father’, abbesses were ‘mother’, and so on. Thus Gothic fictions could explore familial conflicts and cruelties without appearing to do so. [...] Furthermore, these female rebels in religious disguise appropriated ‘masculine’ traits, such as licentiousness and rebelliousness, while also often enforcing the Father’s Law with disconcertingly masculine strength [...].<sup>87</sup>*

This analogy can also be found in the designation of the characters with the lexical field of the family as in “Father Ambrosio”, “Mother St-Agatha” to refer to the Prioress, “son” or “Child” to address the other characters, showing a difference of position in the religious hierarchy as it could be found in non-religious groups in which the father represents the authority, protects and takes the most important decisions for his family. In the abbey, women are subject to authority as individuals since the other monks or male characters are always referred to as a group. Therefore the patriarchal dimension of the Church is still less represented than the female presence in the novel in terms of numbers, however they are more powerful through Ambrosio’s power on the abbey, the authority of the Inquisitors or the apothecary monk who is put in a godlike position by treating Ambrosio and Matilda.

The relationship between Ambrosio and Rosario could also be seen as a father/son relationship in the first part of chapter II. Their relationship is exclusive, away from the other monks, “The Youth had carefully avoided the company of the Monks: He answered their civilities with sweetness, but reserve, and evidently showed that his inclination led him to solitude. To this general rule the Superior was the only exception<sup>88</sup>.” The use of “Father” and

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85 *Family as a Model for the State* | Project Gutenberg Self-Publishing - eBooks | Read eBooks Online. Accessed 20 February 2019. <[http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/Family\\_as\\_a\\_model\\_for\\_the\\_state](http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/Family_as_a_model_for_the_state)>.

86 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk*. op. cit. p. 216.

87 Williams, Anne. “Wicked Women” In Horner, Angela and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*. op. cit. p. 93.

88 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk*. op. cit. pp. 40-41.

“son” and the fact that Ambrosio “[loves Rosario] with all the affection of a Father<sup>89</sup>” emphasise this father/child relationship especially when Ambrosio tries to “protect” Matilda from the other monks, and also protect himself from her, since their relationship becomes more than a filial and spiritual affection.

Yet, on the other hand, this patriarchal power is challenged in the book by the presence of matriarchal areas in which women direct the groups. The convent is the first to be introduced in the main plot, under the management of Mother St-Agatha, the Prioress. She is the feminine auxiliary of Ambrosio and the guardian of Catholic moral authority that nuns must blindly respect in her convent, even if it requires taking part in the punishment of one of them. The other matriarchy of the main plot is that of the Dalfa’s home with Elvira. She acts as a substitute father when Lorenzo comes to meet Antonia to possibly marry her, Elvira is concerned about her daughter’s name and heritage, similarly a father might be concerned in ensuring his line with a male heir:

*[His] eyes met those of Elvira: She punished his falsehood sufficiently by darting at him a look expressive of displeasure and reproach. [...] Lorenzo hastened to repair the fault, which had injured him in Elvira's opinion. [...] He assured her that Raymond was prepared to acknowledge her [...] that till it was in his power to pay his compliments to her in person, Lorenzo was commissioned to supply his place. This intelligence relieved Elvira from a heavy weight of uneasiness: She had now found a Protector for the fatherless Antonia, for whose future fortunes She had suffered the greatest apprehensions. She was not sparing of her thanks to him who had interfered so generously in her behalf; but still She gave him no invitation to repeat his visit<sup>90</sup>.*

In this extract, Elvira is seen in a position of superiority towards Lorenzo as shown by “punished his falsehood by darting him a look expressive of displeasure and reproach,” or “Elvira’s opinion.” She has the last word on refusing Antonia’s relationship, out of concern for her daughter’s well-being since she considers that she is not ready to get attached to any man who could more easily break her heart as she confesses to Antonia:

*You are poor and friendless, my Antonia; [...] Your heart is tender and susceptible: It has already received a strong impression; But when once convinced that you should not encourage such sentiments, I trust, that you have sufficient fortitude to drive them from your bosom<sup>91</sup>.*

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89 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p. 42.: “Ambrosio was every day more charmed with the vivacity of his Genius, the simplicity of his manners, and the rectitude of his heart: In short, He loved him with all the affection of a Father.”

90 *Ibid.* pp. 177-178.

91 *Ibid.* p. 179.

Antonia is also surrounded by other women who educated her such as Leonella, her aunt, who notably lectures her in chapter I during one of her attempts to teach Antonia good manners<sup>92</sup> or the difference between men and women<sup>93</sup>, or Jacintha and Flora, who protect her after Elvira's murder.

The subplot also presents a form of matriarchy in the castle of Lindenberg. Even if the Baron is present and allows Alphonso (Raymond) to stay, the Baroness appears to reign supreme in her castle:

*My Aunt, to others ever harsh proud and contemptuous, remembers that you rescued her from the hands of Murderers, and wears with you alone the appearance of kindness and benignity [...] It was easy to discover that her word was law in the Castle: Her Husband paid her the most absolute submission, and considered her as a superior Being. [...] Her understanding was strong and excellent when not obscured by prejudice, which unluckily was but seldom the case. Her passions were violent: She spared no pains to gratify them, and pursued with unremitting vengeance those who opposed themselves to her wishes.<sup>94</sup>*

Here, matriarchy is not a substitution for the father as in the former example. The husband is completely submissive to his wife, powerless and invisible during Raymond's stay. The Baroness decides to let him stay but also to cast him away and carelessly flirts with the man, ready to break her marriage even if it is unrequited: "Pride, fear and honour, respect for myself, and my engagements to the baron, all are vanished. I sacrifice them for my love for you, and it still seem to me that I pay too mean a price for a possession<sup>95</sup>." Her stubbornness and pragmatism make her a fierce leader yet her femininity is recalled through the intensity and violence of her impulsive emotions and tantrums.

Matriarchies are more represented in *The Monk* which may show the influence of women's authority in society even though these examples may seem a bit extreme and restricted to a private sphere. However the representation of matriarchies in such a best seller highlights the existence of this authority in the eighteenth-century society. The male-controlled areas are reduced to a secluded timeless zone that becomes the most depraved place in the novel. Yet, the power of femininity may be perceived as a potential threat for this patriarchal authority.

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92 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p. 18.

93 *Ibid.* p. 19.

94 *Ibid.* p. 118.

95 *Ibid.* p. 120.

## 2. The threat of femininity

*[While] others with gaping mouths and eyes wide-stretched pointed to a Figure, supposed to have created this disturbance. It represented a Female of more than human stature, clothed in the habit of some religious order. Her face was veiled; on her arm hung a chaplet of beads; Her dress was in several places stained with the blood which trickled from a wound upon her bosom. In one hand She held a Lamp, in the other a large Knife, and She seemed advancing towards the iron gates of the Hall<sup>96</sup>.*

The Bleeding Nun is first introduced by Agnes in the subplot in the course of a discussion with Raymond. As we said, the Bleeding Nun is the ghost of Beatrice de las Cisternas, a former nun who broke her vows by eloping from her convent with the Baron of Lindenberg a century before. Her life is defined by her lustful and destructive actions, from becoming the Baron's concubine with no intention from him to marry her, to cheating on him with Otto, his hungry-for-power brother, and eventually plotting the Baron's murder. Otto eventually kills her to hide evidence of the conspiracy. Ever since, she has kept on haunting the castle on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May every five years. Her appearance demonstrates her former belonging to a religious order with her veil, her dress and the chaplet, but it also depicts the violence she inflicted and received, with the use of the adjective "hung" to qualify the rosary, the knife and the blood found on her dress dripping from the wound on her chest, embodying duality between the presumed purity of a religious woman and her mercilessness "repeating her paternoster, [...] [howling] out the most horrible blasphemies and then [chanting] De profundis as orderly as it still in choir<sup>97</sup>."

The supernatural in Gothic fiction stands for a major manifestation of various problematical phenomena in the novel. *The Monk* is usually put in the category of terror gothic novels because of the "accepted supernatural elements<sup>98</sup>" within the story like the Bleeding Nun who is genuinely acknowledged by the inhabitants as haunting the castle: "Nay, the Baron believes it himself; and as for my Aunt who has a natural turn for the marvellous, She would sooner doubt the veracity of the Bible, than of the Bleeding Nun<sup>99</sup>." Agnes emphasises the existence of this character without giving a reason to the fear of this ghost.

Beatrice's ghost may, therefore, represent the threat of femininity over a potential patriarchal authority. In her life, she makes her choices individually after being forced to take the

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<sup>96</sup> Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk*. *op.cit.* pp. 122-123.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* p. 124.

<sup>98</sup> *Glossary of the Gothic: Supernatural | Glossary of the Gothic | Marquette University*. Accessed 26 February 2019. <[https://epublications.marquette.edu/gothic\\_supernatural/](https://epublications.marquette.edu/gothic_supernatural/)>.

<sup>99</sup> Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk*. *op.cit.* p. 123.



veil at an early age before she could ever experience all the temptations that the world may offer to a young woman<sup>100</sup>. She could be seen as epitomising repressed feminine desires in order to avoid becoming a fallen woman. According to Angela Wright, Agnes's choice of words to describe the Bleeding Nun as "[needing] to make some noise in the world" emphasises that women go unnoticed in society whether they are virtuous or depraved<sup>101</sup>. Agnes' lifetime is cadenced by transgressions, which makes her a fallen woman in view of society. She is qualified by the Exorciser as follows: "Her feasts vied in luxury with Cleopatra's, and Lindenberg became the Theatre of the most unbridled debauchery. Not satisfied with displaying the incontinence of a Prostitute, She professed herself an Atheist<sup>102</sup>." Her distance from religion would explain why she is still wandering as a ghost in the castle, as she cannot get any form of redemption through Purgatory.

The threat of femininity may also be seen with the references to blood. The obvious one is the deadly wound on her breast, which keeps bleeding and stains her ghostly clothes. Yet, the bleeding may also imply the menstrual cycle which refers to women's capacity to carry children. Moreover, the menstrual cycle is still a taboo in societies and even more in religion. Thus, chastity is one of the nun's vow however by carrying children or sexual activity in general, this expectation is unreachd, which extents the Bleeding Nun's monstrosity to the only coincidence of being a woman as, by bleeding, she may not conform to her vow. The focus on her wound is interesting to consider because of its location. She has been wounded at the breast, an emblematic symbol of the feminine body that has a double symbolic dimension of the nourishing breast of the mother but also an object of desire, as it is the case when Matilda strips her chest to threaten to stab herself in front of Ambrosio, a scene in which she is seen in a situation of power. The Bleeding Nun is powerful through the fear she inspires to whoever crosses her path. Furthermore, the ghost refers to something ancient lingering over the castle, thus the Bleeding Nun may represent the potential threat of femininity that has always been present among the living since the beginning of times. The position of the wound

<sup>100</sup>Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p. 151.: "Beatrice de las Cisternas took the veil at an early age, not by her own choice, but at the express command of her parents. She was then too young to regret the pleasure of which her profession deprived her."

<sup>101</sup>Wright, Angela. "Heroines in Flight: Narrating Invisibility and Maturity in Women's Gothic Writing of the Romantic Period", In Horner, Angela and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Guide. op. cit.* p. 20.: "The invisibility of the Nun during her life, forced into a convent in place of a premature marriage, is foregrounded and criticised through Agnes's choice of words; she can only 'make some noise in the world' upon death as 'unluckily' in life she was not recognised."

<sup>102</sup>Wright, Angela. "Heroines in Flight: Narrating Invisibility and Maturity in Women's Gothic Writing of the Romantic Period", In Horner, Angela and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Guide. op. cit.* p. 151.

may also evoke Christ's wound on his side when he dies on the cross, making the Bleeding Nun a martyr, who becomes an advocate of women's condition as it is explained in this quote extracted from the episode *The Abominable Bride* of the BBC series *Sherlock*:

***“Sherlock Holmes:*** *Look around you. This room is full of Brides. Once she has risen, anyone could be her. The avenging ghost – a legend to strike terror into the heart of any man with malicious intent: a spectre to stalk those unpunished brutes whose reckoning is long overdue. A league of furies awakened. The women I... we have lied to, betrayed... the women we have ignored... and disparaged. Once the idea exists, it cannot be killed.*”<sup>103</sup>

This case features a revengeful ghostly bride figuring as the representative of a group of Women's Rights Movement refers to the concept of this lingering menace that cannot be destroyed as in the case of the Bleeding Nun. The ghost oversteps death itself and frightens the men from the castle as the legend is “handed down from father to son<sup>104</sup>.” Beatrice de las Cisternas has been tricked by her first lover by a promise of a wedding, but then she eventually kills him after plotting with his brother who eventually kills her as well. She becomes an avenging ghost after being betrayed twice by men. There is also a parallel between the Brides and the Furies, who personify vengeance in Greek mythology and whose function is to “take vengeance of men, whosoever hath sworn a false oath<sup>105</sup>.” In the same vein, the Bleeding Nun becomes allegorical and represents vengeance, an equivalent to the Furies. As a ghost, she has no fleshy sheath but her spirit is immortal, which recalls the last sentence in *Sherlock* “Once the idea exists, it cannot be killed.” It does not physically exist outside of the psyche and can be passed through generations, thus it cannot disappear.

Parallels can be drawn between Agnes and the Bleeding Nun. The ghost is firstly used as a subterfuge to escape from Cunegonda, Agnes's governess, who claims witnessing the Bleeding Nun five years before. Agnes dresses up as the ghost to elope more easily. Her madness, when she is under the opiate in the vaults, surrounded by corpses in the mass grave<sup>106</sup>,

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103 Sherlock Holmes (Benedict Cumberbatch), “The Abominable Bride”, *Sherlock*, Season 4, Episode 0. 1:14:17 – 1:15:05.

104 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op.cit.* p. 123.

105 Homer, *Iliad*, Book 19, Line 238. Accessed 9 January 2020. <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0012.tlg001.perseus-eng1:19.238-19.275>>.

106 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *op.cit.* pp. 344-345.: “I now found myself in a vault tolerably spacious. Several tombs, similar in appearance to that whence I had just escaped, were ranged along the sides in order, and seemed to be considerably sunk within the earth. A sepulchral lamp was suspended from the roof by an iron chain, and shed a gloomy light through the dungeon. Emblems of death were seen on every side [...] To these objects I at first paid no attention: a door, the only outlet from the vault, had attracted my eyes. [...] I pushed against the door, and, to my inexpressible terror found that it was fastened on the outside. [...] [The] prioress [...] instead of poison had administered a strong opiate. [...] I stretched my voice to the extent of its compass, and shrieked for aid. I was remote from the hearing of every one.”

also recalls the Bleeding Nun's ramblings. Therefore, the Bleeding Nun's existence has an influence on Agnes's fate. She represents transgression from the past about to be reproduced at the time of the plot, Agnes is then a "living Bleeding Nun" with the difference that she gets a form of redemption at the end of the novel. Furthermore, she plays her part as an "avenging ghost<sup>107</sup>" by cursing Ambrosio when she is locked away<sup>108</sup>, which foreshadows the outcome of the plot. Her redemption might be due to the fact that she has served her sentence through the death of her baby. Unlike Beatrice who dies unmarried and not properly buried, Agnes is only drugged and "buried alive" by being imprisoned in the underground vault but does not die and eventually marries Raymond after he saves her.

### 3. The depiction of masculine characters

The evolution of male characters in the novel such as Lorenzo, Raymond, Ambrosio or Theodore conforms them in the masculine archetypes found in Gothic literature and folk tales. A folk tale can be defined as a "story originating in popular culture, typically passed on by word to mouth<sup>109</sup>," and commonly corresponds to a recurrent structure of actions that Vladimir Propp describes in *The Morphology of the Folktale*<sup>110</sup>. He studies several Russian tales by using their characters as the starting point, and establishes archetypes, known as Propp's *dramatis personae*<sup>111</sup>, assigning each of them a function, such as the hero, the villain, the princess or the helper and taking into account that one character can fit several categories and in return, one archetype can refer to different characters.

In *The Monk*, the folktale structure and archetypes can mostly be found in the subplot with Raymond's journey but also in the characterisation of the protagonists in both plots. Raymond becomes an intradiegetic narrator and the main protagonist of his own story. He belongs to the Proppian "spheres of action" of the false hero in his progression. He leaves Salamanca after finishing his studies to travel in Europe. He faces transgression when he meets Agnes, the archetype of the princess or sought-for person, whose fate is to become a nun and

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107 As she is considered dead after she is sent to the underground vaults.

108 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p. 46.: "Insolent in your yet-unshaken virtue? What temptations have you vanished? [...] By the day of trial will arrive. Oh! Then when you yield to impetuous passions, you look back upon your crimes, and solicit, with terror, the mercy of your God, oh! In that fearful moment think upon me! Think upon your cruelty! Think upon Agnes, and despair of pardon."

109 'Folk Tale | Definition of Folk Tale in English by Oxford Dictionaries'. *Oxford Dictionaries | English*. Accessed 2 March 2019. <[https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/folk\\_tale](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/folk_tale)>.

110 Propp, Vladimir Iakovlevitch, et al. *Morphologie du conte suivi de Les transformations des contes merveilleux*. Paris: Seuil. 1970.

111 "the masks of the drama" in Latin.

defines the purpose of his quest, setting her free. He travels with Theodore, his squire, the helper<sup>112</sup>. Yet, this escape ends up with the Bleeding Nun replacing Agnes and punishing the false hero's transgression by tormenting him during his convalescence<sup>113</sup>. Agnes eventually takes the veil and the quest remains uncompleted until Lorenzo decides to set his sister free. He becomes the new heroic figure of his own quest but also the dispatcher and helper of Raymond's. Theodore keeps the same function by gathering information from the nuns about Agnes being still alive as his master is mourning her<sup>114</sup>. Both quests end with the weddings of the two heroes with their "princesses."

Lorenzo may be the heroic archetype of the main plot, his quest starts with his encounter with Antonia, Lorenzo's "princess" and dispatcher archetypes as she asks him to inform the Marquis de las Cisternas of her and Elvira's situation. Later, Elvira tests his worth as Antonia's suitor. Afterwards, he becomes the helper as well as the provider of information for Raymond about Agnes. His quest is abruptly stopped with Antonia's death in his arms<sup>115</sup>, and the objet of his quest is replaced by Virginia who helped him to get to Agnes. Lorenzo eventually marries. Women in the structure of the folk tale are more likely to be seen as simple rewards than fully-fledged characters with a proper storyline, as shown by the example of Virginia who appears as a consolation prize for Lorenzo after losing Antonia<sup>116</sup>.

In *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, Maggie Kilgour also describes Lorenzo by emphasising his rationality, a facet specific to the Enlightenment period. She compares him to Ambrosio and his function as a villain in the main plot:

*However, to be enlightened in this gothic world is to be as ignorant and as blind as Antonia, as superstition and reason are both polarised and yet identified. Typically in the gothic novel, it is the villain [...] who mocks superstition. In Lewis's text it is not the villain but the hero. But the two figures are doubles for each other, whose identity is indicated by the fact that they are often connected in Antonia's imagination.<sup>117</sup>*

Kilgour bases her argument on the first chapter when both characters first appear in opposition like hero and villain in folk tales. Antonia interacts with these two male characters (Lorenzo and Ambrosio) in the novel. These two men are portrayed as such through her eyes in the first chapter. Lorenzo is part of the crowd, an anonymous cavalier paired with another

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112 Propp, Vladimir Iakovlevitch, et al. *Morphologie du conte suivi de Les transformations des contes merveilleux*. Paris: Seuil. 1970. pp. 132-133.

113 *Ibid.* pp. 139-142.

114 *Ibid.* pp. 245-255.

115 *Ibid.* pp. 335-336.

116 *Ibid.* p. 357.

117 Kilgour, Maggie. *The Rise of the Gothic Novel. op.cit.* pp. 158-159.

before he gives his seat and properly introduces himself: “This broad hint attracted the notice of two cavaliers, who occupied stools on the right hand, and were leaning their backs against the seventh column from the pulpit. [...] Don Lorenzo (such was the chavalier’s, whose seat she had accepted)<sup>118</sup>.” He is the rational character who “becomes the demystifier who uncovers the fraud<sup>119</sup>.” In the crowd, he is at the same level as Antonia, and may act as an auxiliary by embodying the archetype of the hero. In comparison, Ambrosio stands out from the ordinary mortal as his nickname “The Man of Holiness<sup>120</sup>” suggests. He is admired and respected by the parishioners, looked up to during his sermon: “They who were insensible to religion’s merits, were still enchanted with Ambrosio’s oratory. All found their attention irresistibly attracted while her spoke, and the most profound silence reigned through the crowded aisles<sup>121</sup>.” Unlike Lorenzo, he lives in the superstition and hypocrisy of the Church, embodying such “holiness” when his behaviour goes against all moral rules. Ambrosio is overlooking the crowd as the threat of the Gothic villain hovering over Antonia.

Masculinity in Gothic fiction is split between the two main archetypes of the hero, a man of sensibility, and the villain, a man of destructive passion and pride, respectively represented by Lorenzo and Ambrosio<sup>122</sup>. This pairing, according to Cynthia Wolff<sup>123</sup>, comes from the construct of the “Virgin/Whore” syndrome that describes the male perception of women as either “good,” they are idealized and with no sensual desire, or “bad”, they are sexualized. In later criticisms, psychologists consider the “Devil/Priest” syndrome as the masculine equivalent.

*[The] demon lover is a figure of considerable power that would exert a malevolent influence; the hero (a considerably less potent figure throughout much of the novel) is a force for order and benevolent control. [...] The hero is sensitive, honorable, feeling gentleman, who not only weeps at the landscape, but also manages to stop seeping at the exact moment that the heroine needs rescuing. The hero-villain is a dark, cruel, sadistic man from whom any 18<sup>th</sup>-century Gothic heroine worth her salt will “shrink” from the moment she sees him.<sup>124</sup>*

118 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op.cit.* pp. 12-13.

119 Kilgour, Maggie. *The Rise of the Gothic Novel. op.cit.* p. 159.

120 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op.cit.* pp. 19-20.

121 *Ibid.* p. 20.

122 Ruotolo, Christine, et al. “Hero or Hero-Villain?: Defining Masculinity in the Female Gothic”, *The Gothic: Materials for Study*. 1995. Accessed 20 October 2018. <<http://mural.uv.es/maseja/The%20Gothic%20Materials%20For%20Study.htm>>.

123 Wolff, Cynthia. “The Racliffean Gothic Model”, in Juliann E. Fleenor. *The Female Gothic*. Montreal: Eden Press. 1983. 207-223.

124 Ruotolo, Christine, et al. “Hero or Hero-Villain?: Defining Masculinity in the Female Gothic”, *The Gothic: Materials for Study*. 1995. Accessed 20 October 2018. <<http://mural.uv.es/maseja/The%20Gothic%20Materials%20For%20Study.htm>>.

The definition of a hero is close to the idea of a Romantic hero, however nature is not central for Lorenzo and he embodies the balance between this concept of the hero and social expectations for a young man who respects the decorum of the society he lives in. He is determined on his goals yet can often act impulsively, for example when he plans the convent's mob to find Agnes and punish the Prioress<sup>125</sup>. In addition, he is not physically described, apart from being young and rich<sup>126</sup>, unlike Ambrosio who is described through the crowd's point of view:

*He was a Man of noble port and commanding presence. His stature was lofty, and his features uncommonly handsome. His Nose was aquiline, his eyes large black and sparkling, and his dark brows almost joined together. His complexion was of a deep but clear Brown; study and watching had entirely deprived his cheek of colour*<sup>127</sup>.

The description enables the reader to visualise the physical appearance of the monk with adjectives such as “uncommonly handsome,” or a “deep but clear Brown” carnation. Giving Ambrosio a proper description, enables readers to picture him as other female characters. He could represent the main antagonist of the story. He goes against all social or natural laws as long as he is driven by his urges when he associates with Lucifer to get to his victim<sup>128</sup> or when he murders his own mother<sup>129</sup>.

Conformism may also be found in social expectations regarding social status. Raymond is an heir to a noble family and eventually becomes the Marquis De las Cisternas before the beginning of the story with the death of his father, who used to be the Dalfa's benefactor as well as Antonia's grandfather. Consequently, Raymond is supposed to ensure at the same time his obligations as a public figure of Madrid and as a benefactor uncle towards Antonia. His status of marquis is even more important as before he physically appears in the novel as he is only referred to by his title. Despite his nobility, The Baroness of Lindenberg portrays Raymond unflatteringly as a deceitful opportunist who goes against the standards and ethics he has been taught to respect because of his attempt to elope with Agnes. Raymond has the intention of marrying Agnes yet, he transgresses social decorum by getting her pregnant before their union.

Lorenzo also has to face social expectations. As mentioned earlier, he appears as relatively anonymous at the beginning, emphasising an absence of major social duties in compar-

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125 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p. 296.

126 *Ibid.* p. 12.

127 *Ibid.* p. 20.

128 *Ibid.* pp. 236-239.

129 *Ibid.* pp. 262-263 and pp. 374-375.

ison to his friend. Lorenzo's main concerns regarding society's expectations are limited to courting Antonia and possibly marrying her. We know from the first chapter that he is rich, the Duke of Medina Celi's nephew and only heir, consequently he is expected by Elvira to be self-sufficient enough to deserve her daughter as a potential wife. Yet, she refuses to let him court Antonia as long as she has no proof that the Duke consented to this union<sup>130</sup>. However, this prospect tragically fails with Antonia's death. In this perspective, Virginia appears as the last resort for him to marry<sup>131</sup> and get a folk tale's happy ending.

The boundary between conformism and transgression from the male characters' points of view is more complicated to establish as they tally with the hero archetypes for Raymond and Lorenzo. Ambrosio's characterisation seems more complicated to establish since he lives in a different frame of reference, which is the monastery, therefore social rules may not be applied to him directly because of his status as an abbot and of his role of villain in the structure of the story.

## **B) The influence of religion**

Religion is central in *The Monk* beyond the use of a function in the Church as its title. The setting of the main plot is in the convent of Ste Clare which is also the place of transgressions regarding religion or justice. In a first part, we will deal with the representation of religion in Gothic Fiction with the Anti-Catholic feeling that emerges in England with the Reformation. Secondly, the over-zealousness of members of the Church will be analysed to show how it can lead to transgression but also to make a parallel with *The Nun* written by Denis Diderot and published in 1796 as well.

### 1. Representation of religion in Gothic Fiction

The origins of Gothic Fiction, notably for its inspirations, rely on the Catholic tradition of the cathedrals during the Middle Ages. This architecture is brought back in the eighteenth century by the Gothic revival exemplified in private places such as Strawberry Hill, Sir Horace Walpole's residence. A return to the Gothic times can be observed at the same time, with the evolution of mindset during the Enlightenment period by putting aside the past filled with

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130 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p. 174.

131 *Ibid.* p. 357.

“ideas of barbarous customs and practices, of superstition, ignorance, extravagant fancies and natural wildness<sup>132</sup>” and religion in favour of scientific rationality.

*Enlightenment rationalism displaced religion as the authoritative mode of explaining the universe and altered conceptions of the relations between individuals and natural, supernatural and social worlds. Gothic works and their disturbing ambivalence can thus be seen as effects of fear and anxiety, as attempts to account for or deal with the uncertainty of these shifts. They are also attempts to explain what the Enlightenment left unexplained, efforts to reconstruct the divine mysteries that reason had begun to dismantle, to recuperate pasts and histories that offered a permanence and unity beyond the scope of rational and moral order. In this respect the past labelled gothic was a site of struggle between enlightened forces of progress, and more conservative impulses to retain continuity<sup>133</sup>.*

Religion has always had the status of an authoritative institution and an inexhaustible mythological resource that will justify what cannot be rationally explained or the supernatural. *The Castle of Otranto*, acknowledged as the first Gothic work in 1756, lays the foundations of the genre. The first edition is presented as a translation of an Italian manuscript found “in the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England.<sup>134</sup>” Catholic religion is synonymous with unfortunate events, as the death scenes are located in the chapel, and restriction evoked through Friar Jerome’s refusal of Manfred’s divorce, recalling the Pope’s refusal leading to the English Reformation. Consequently, religion is seen as a device for tragedy showing divine wrath in response to the characters’ misbehaviour from which these same protagonists cannot escape. Kate Adams in her article “Anti-Catholicism in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*” considers that this text “formed the basis for all the literature that would follow. The shadow cast over religion by Walpole is extremely evident in the anti-Catholic themes [of *The Monk*]<sup>135</sup>”

In *The Monk*, religion is present as early as the novel’s title, but mostly with the macrocosm of the convent in both plots. The main plot is settled in a different country in which Catholicism is the main religion. Anti-Catholicism can already be seen in the opening scene, in the church where all the population gathers, more motivated by selfish pride than genuine piety. Besides in the sermon, the abbot claims the “beauties of religion” and threatens his vicious audience of “punishments reserved for them in a future state,” emphasised by the thun-

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132 Botting, Fred. *Gothic. op. cit.* p. 21.

133 Botting, Fred. *Gothic. op. cit.* p. 22.

134 Walpole, Horace. *The Castle of Otranto*. 1764. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2001. p. 5.

135 Adams, Kate. ‘Anti-Catholicism in Matthew Lewis’ *The Monk*. *VAMPS: Journal of Absurdity and Horror*. 1.1 (2017): 71–74. p. 71.



der rolling outside of the chapel<sup>136</sup>. Manifestations of deities in mythological texts are often associated with changes in the weather. As Ambrosio is from Catholic tradition, his sermon and the weather may refer to the Apocalypse of John in the Bible but also to Zeus's wrath in Greek mythology, represented by thunder and lightning. Moreover, the physical protection of the church members by the building can symbolically be seen as the Christian Church protecting a handful of elects from the chaotic mortal world they live in. It is also the place and the moment when Antonia lays her eyes on Ambrosio "with undivided attention<sup>137</sup>," she is charmed like the rest of the crowd. Paradoxically, the Church becomes a form of temptation for the church attendants and for Antonia.

The shadow of religion in the novel is also present in the subplot. Indeed, Agnes is soon to become one of them and educated at the convent near Lindenberg's castle to prepare herself to her future life: "she goes regularly every Friday to the convent of St Catharine, in which she was brought up<sup>138</sup>." But also, it can be seen through the Bleeding Nun. If she represents the feminine threat to patriarchy, she could also be seen as the threat of Catholicism towards Protestantism. Her ghostly appearance would be a reminder to the English Anglican audience that Catholicism is always present and likely to take its revenge. Transgressions committed before and during the entire plot are associated in some measure to religion by the convent's enclosure, by their actors, with the Bleeding Nun, the soon-to-be nun Agnes, the Prioress or Ambrosio or by the type of rule they are violating, biblical interdictions or social taboos linked to religion. In addition, the ghost's bleeding wound could refer to the Reformation and the other religious conflicts caused by Catholicism or by the Inquisition, which mostly ended in bloodbaths in England, or in others parts of Europe with European wars of religion. The Inquisition is present in the novel as a character to repress the sinful actions of Ambrosio and Matilda<sup>139</sup>.

Religion also represents a physical and psychological prison with the convent of St-Clare. Imprisonment can be seen through Agnes's desire to escape the convent, in Raymond's letter, "All is ready for your escape, my dearest Agnes. [...] Remember [...] that flight is the only means of avoiding the effects of their malevolent resentment. Farewell, my Agnes! My dear and destined Wife! Fail not to be at the Garden door at twelve!<sup>140</sup>". Ambrosio's stubborn-

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136 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p. 20.

137 *Ibid.*

138 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p. 129.

139 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* pp. 361-363.

140 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* pp. 43-44.

ness shows Catholicism and especially monastic life as a fetter for the characters. Ambrosio was taken in at a young age and raised within the monastery, as a consequence, his education never led him further than the monastery. This unbending respect for monastic life is challenged when he is asked by Antonia to come by Elvira's side as her confessor outside of the monastery, but he will transgress these rules in order to get closer to Antonia. However he remains concerned by being seen outside in Madrid's streets:

*He passed a few minutes in doubt: but Antonia's empire over him was already too much decided to permit his making a long resistance to the idea which struck him. He resolved to be the confessor himself. He could leave the abbey unobserved without difficulty: by wrapping up his head in his cowl he hoped to pass through the streets without being recognised: by taking these precautions, and by recommending secrecy to Elvira's family, he doubted not to keep Madrid in ignorance that he had broken his vow never to see the outside of the abbey-walls<sup>141</sup>.*

This quotation also points out religion as the only form of help and redemption expected by the characters. In this extract, Antonia is hopelessly looking for any sort of help for Elvira. Faith then appears as the only way of recovery for her mother, that will thereafter precipitate her actual end. This idea of help may also be seen in the intentions of prayers of Rosario who asks Ambrosio to pray for one of his friends<sup>142</sup>, though this intention is a subterfuge. The characters also request the church's help for paranormal phenomena when Jacintha rushes to the abbot after the apparition of Elvira's ghost to Antonia to seek his assistance: "She had conceived a great opinion of his piety and virtue; and supposing him to have much influence over the Devil, thought that it must be an easy matter for him to lay Elvira's Ghost in the Red Sea<sup>143</sup>." This extract emphasises again the holiness of the man, and, by extension of the church.

However, the constant reminder of the obligation to follow decorum may be perceived as maniac and goes further than simply praying inside of convent. This can be seen with Ambrosio and the Prioress who, as figures of authority, are also in charge to put Agnes back on the right track.

## 2. Over-zealousness leading to transgression

*Un des abus des plus horribles de l'état monastique, mais qui ne tombe que sur ceux qui, ayant eu l'imprudence de se faire moines, ont le malheur de s'en repentir, c'est la licence que les supérieurs des couvents se donnent d'exercer la justice et d'être*

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141 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk*. op. cit. p. 210.

142 *Ibid.* p. 41.

143 *Ibid.* p. 276.

*chez eux lieutenants criminels : ils enferment pour toujours dans des cachots souterrains ceux dont ils sont mécontents ou donc ils se défont. Il y en a eu en France : c'est ce que dans le jargon des moines ils appellation "être [in pace,]" à l'eau d'angoisse et au pain de tribulation.<sup>144</sup>*

In this extract from *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* published between 1756 and 1769, Voltaire, a French philosopher from the Enlightenment period confronts monastic life by denouncing the cruelty of convents under the pretext of respecting the rules imposed by this lifestyle. In 1796, Diderot writes and publishes his first drafts of *The Nun*, narrating the story of a young woman, sent to the convent by her parents, who refuses to become a nun and suffers from the mistreatment she receives from the different religious communities. In this book, Suzanne Simonin, the main character, is sent by force in three different convents in which she is urged to pronounce her vows to make amends for her mother's acts as she has cheated on her husband with Suzanne's father, therefore her illegitimate birth is a transgression that can only be fixed by her daughter taking the veil<sup>145</sup>. Consequently, her opposition to becoming a nun can be seen as a consequence of this affair, and already sets her apart from her others half-sisters and the other nuns. Suzanne's need for independence causes her to be severely punished by the abbesses of the convent, especially Mother St. Christine who unwaveringly directs her nuns. They punish Suzanne for her apostasy by tearing her veil off, changing her cloth for a simple shirt, dragging her on the floor to lock her away for three days in a "small dark underground place" which is actually a crypt<sup>146</sup>. This punishment recalls Agnes's punishment when she is drugged with an opiate and left for dead by the nuns and the domina<sup>147</sup>. Moreover, the accusations of Mother St. Christine and of Mother St. Agatha are similar in both novels:

*'Overlook it, say you? Mother Camilla, you amaze me! What? After disgracing me in the presence of Madrid's Idol, of the very Man on whom I most wished to impress an idea of the strictness of my discipline? How despicable must I have appeared to the reverend Abbot! No, Mother, No! I never can forgive the insult. I cannot better convince Ambrosio that I abhor such crimes, than by punishing that of Agnes with all the rigour of which our severe laws admit. Cease then your supplications; they will all be unavailing. My resolution is taken: Tomorrow Agnes shall be made a terrible example of my justice and resentment<sup>148</sup>.*'

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144 Voltaire. "Chapitre CXXXIX : Des ordres religieux", *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*. 1756-1729. Paris: Éd. R.Pomeau, Garnier. Vol.2. 1963. p. 291.

145 Diderot, Denis. *La Religieuse*. 1796. Paris: Flammarion. 2009. pp. 31-33.

146 *Ibid.* pp. 61-62.

147 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p.346.

148 *Ibid.* p. 199.

“— [...] Vous avez affecté de louer celle qui m'avait précédée, pour me rabaisser; de mépriser les usages qu'elle avait proscrits, les lois qu'elle avait abolies et que j'ai cru devoir rétablir; [...] J'aurais pu sévir contre vous par les voies les plus dures ; je vous ai ménagée: [...] vous avez des projets ; l'intérêt de la maison exige que je les connaisse, et je les connaîtrai ; c'est moi qui vous en réponds. Sœur Suzanne, dites-moi la vérité.” [...] Elles criaient toutes ensemble: “Point de miséricorde, Madame ; ne vous laissez pas toucher: qu'elle donne ses papiers, ou qu'elle aille en paix<sup>149</sup>...” [...] “—Ma chère mère, lui dis-je, je n'ai rien fait qui puisse offenser ni Dieu, ni les hommes, je vous le jure. —Ce n'est pas là le serment que je veux. —Elle aura écrit contre nous, contre vous, quelque mémoire au grand vicaire, à l'archevêque ; Dieu sait comme elle aura peint l'intérieur de la maison ; on croit aisément le mal. Madame, il faut disposer de cette créature, si vous ne voulez pas qu'elle dispose de nous<sup>150</sup>.”

In both extracts, the nuns are as much punished because of the offence to their position as they challenge the authority and the credibility of their mother superiors. Both of them dread to be reported to a superior figure of the church. The Prioress does not tolerate that a sinful nun, whom she considers as an immoral creature, should question her authority especially in front of Ambrosio. On the other hand, Mother St. Christine punishes “her calumny” against the convent if Suzanne manages to report to the vicar general or to the archbishop. In both novels, Suzanne and Agnes represent figures of resistance against the clergy, hence the utility of punishing them as examples for their entire communities to prevent any form of conflict.

Consequently, the idea of silencing women and qualifying them as mad are representative of the stigmatisation of women whose opinions may disturb society by locking them away to re-establish authority and hierarchy within the convent. Max Byrd evokes this restraint in his article *The Madhouse, the Whorehouse, and the Convent*<sup>151</sup> by depicting the convent at first as “a symbol of self-control and reason<sup>152</sup>” in Gothic novels, when it is actually “a den of incarceration, just as the madhouse and the whorehouse do in earlier literature; inwardly it harbors row after row of dungeons like this one in the Monk where unreason is shut away<sup>153</sup>.” He explains that this imagery is linked to the meaning of incarceration in the eighteenth century. Firstly the comprehension of this metaphor is literal with the restraint of passions by moral and social institutions, then in the late eighteenth century, this isolation is more

149 “en paix”, “in peace”, *in pace* in latin, refers to solitary confinement as a punishment in monastic jargon.

150 Diderot, Denis. *La Religieuse. op. cit.* pp. 60-61.

151 Byrd, Max. ‘The Madhouse, the Whorehouse, and the Convent.’ *Partisan Review*. 44.2 (1977): p. 268.

152 *Ibid.*

153 *Ibid.*

associated with the idea of burial of madness in “the deepest recesses of the human mind<sup>154</sup>.” The parallel with the madhouse is even more obvious in the catacombs of the convent in which all madness is heightened. If the underground is a symbol of the unconscious, then every impulse of transgression is kept locked away from prying eyes to conceal the reality of such a holy place being a place of vices. The Prioress gives way to her obsessive authority and respect of the inflexible rules on the convent: obedience, poverty and chastity. Her character follows the archetype of the ‘bad abbess’ defined as a ‘villainess’ by Ann B. Tracy in her *Index to Gothic Motifs*<sup>155</sup>. This classification is disassociated from the other archetypes of nuns and novices because they are not directly depicted as proper villainesses but rather as ‘loose women’ whose characteristics may be ‘debauched’, ‘eloped’, ‘ruined’, or ‘wicked’ according to Tracy<sup>156</sup>. This difference between these patterns shows that their commitment as nuns is rather temporary but also points out their mental fickleness, which makes their behaviour and villainy less extreme than the abbess’s.

However, we must recall that the nuns are agents of the Church authority, therefore this “madness” could also be seen as resulting from the pressure to conform to the rules that they have to follow if they do not want to become “a terrible example of [the Prioress’s] justice and resentment<sup>157</sup>.” At the beginning of Agnes’s incarceration, the Prioress is the only one to take part in the punishment and is later replaced by other nuns who become torturers under the implicit authorisation of the Prioress, which conscientiously releases them from any culpability. Moreover, Ste Clare is known as the patron saint of illnesses relating to eyes, which may show that what happens within the convent remains invisible for outsiders but also for its inhabitants as they willingly “close their eyes”.

The punishment could be seen as a literary example of the Stanford Prison Experiment<sup>158</sup> led by Phillip Zimbardo much later in 1971. This social psychology experiment consists in a simulation of a prison-like environment with a group of students, who were tested as sane with no tendencies to evil, sorted either as prisoners or as guards and left in total control of the treatment of the prisoners. It was stopped after a few days because of a quick change of behaviours from the guards harassing the prisoners, which has been referred to as “The Luci-

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154 *Ibid.*

155 Tracy, Ann B. *The Gothic Novel 1790-1830: Plot Summaries and Index to Motifs*. University Press of Kentucky, Lexington. 1976.

156 Williams, Anne. “Wicked Women”, in Horner, Angela and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*. *op. cit.* p. 93.

157 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk*. *op. cit.* p.199.

158 Knight, Darby. ‘Description of Study’. *THE STANFORD PRISON EXPERIMENT*. 29 August 2018. Accessed on 20 March 2019. <<http://www.thestanfordprisonexperiment.org/description-of-study.html>>.

fer Effect” by Stanley Milgram. The results show the phenomenon of "deindividuation" turning “good” students into “evil” guards as their brutal and sadistic actions were committed under the influence of the herd instinct as they had been conditioned to feel free of any individual culpability by Zimbardo. As mentioned earlier, the nuns of the convent St Clare take part in Agnes’s punishment:

*I am certain that none of my Tormentors, (for the three other Nuns entered my prison occasionally) were so much actuated by the spirit of oppressive cruelty as by the idea that to afflict my body was the only way to preserve my soul. [...] Camilla, being most employed about me, was particularly charged by the Prioress to treat me with harshness. In compliance with these orders, She frequently strove to convince me, how just was my punishment, and how enormous was my crime: [...] Yet as I before observed, She always concluded by words of encouragement and comfort; and though uttered by Camilla's lips, I easily recognised the Domina's expressions.<sup>159</sup>*

This extract shows that the other nuns are submissive to the Prioress and not necessarily accustomed to violence. If we recall Zimbardo’s experiment, while showing an inflexible morality in the convent and in the city, their extreme obedience to their domina justifies the physical and mental abuse on Agnes, even if such conducts are condemned by religious concepts.

Another representation of this over-zealousness may be seen in the presence of the Inquisition at the end of the novel. Its shadow threatens all characters that transgress the rules, even minor characters. The Inquisition had an important role in Spanish society after the Reconquista and the Protestant Reformation, especially in the sixteenth century, with the violent persecution of Non-Catholics among the Spanish population. The aim of this institution is to suppress every form of heresy in order to unify the Spanish kingdom after these religious conflicts<sup>160</sup>. By urging people to convert to Christianity and judging those accused of witchcraft through torture, their methods are perceived as a transgressive use of religion. This presentation reinforces the anti-Catholicism of the era by using accounts of these tortures in Gothic fiction<sup>161</sup>. *The Monk* is marked by this religious frenzy and the violence depicted in it through various means. Indeed, the Prioress’s violence and madness are punished by the crowd beating her up during the attack of the convent under the command of Lorenzo. The Inquisition threatens with this same violence, which could punish any infringement of religious institution, as it is mentioned by Don Ramirez: “He threatened the Mob with the vengeance of the

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159 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk*. *op. cit.* pp. 352-353.

160 Ryan, Edward A. ‘Spanish Inquisition | Definition, History, & Facts’. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Accessed 5 December 2018. <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Spanish-Inquisition>>.

161 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk*. *op. cit.* p.382.

Inquisition: But in this moment of popular phrenzy even this dreadful name had lost its effect<sup>162</sup>.” Moreover, the use of “vengeance” and “dreadful” by the Inquisition represents the ultimate proof that religion is like a Pandora’s box that has been opened and now releases all evils of the world. The actual violence of the Inquisition can be read in the last chapter when Ambrosio and Matilda are arrested for witchcraft. However, the accusations of murder and rape are not judged nor condemned<sup>163</sup>. This indifference could mean that such transgressions are left under a more metaphysical jurisdiction, God or the Devil, as Lucifer kills Ambrosio after enumerating his misdeeds<sup>164</sup>. The emphasis is on judgement and torture used on Ambrosio and Matilda to serve their sentences and redeem their sins<sup>165</sup>. The climax of their cruelty is the emblematic auto-da-fé, which initially refers to both the place of execution and to the proper public ceremony of execution. Consequently, Lewis mentions this spectacular execution as Ambrosio’s and Matilda’s penances to emphasize the Church’s own transgression of the sixth commandment in the Decalogue, which serves as a basis of justice in the Bible: “*Thou shalt not kill*”. Again, torture shows the punishment reserved to “heretics” or to other believers from other confessions who are exhorted to convert to Catholicism. England becoming a Protestant country around the same period, the presence of the Inquisition plays a role in the anti-Catholicism of the time in Gothic literature presenting it as threatening for the new Church of England and belonging to more barbaric and heathen times that have not evolved.

### **C) Matilda as the most emancipated character**

Matilda is a singular woman in *The Monk* in comparison with the others feminine characters. She embodies the opposite of the ideal feminine behaviour and, as a consequence, she represents a model of emancipation from the bourgeois rules, far from the traditional gothic heroine. Firstly, her dual nature will be analysed through Rosario and her duality between femininity and masculinity. In terms of emancipation, the figure of the witch was often frowned upon by the political and religious institutions of the modern era but is now seen as a figure of rebellion to a patriarchal system<sup>166</sup>, therefore the second part explains how she may be considered as a witch according to the beliefs of the time; and finally we will consider

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162 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p. 300.

163 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p. 361.

164 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* pp. 374-375.

165 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* pp. 361-363.

166 Chollet, Mona. *Sorcières : La puissance invaincue des femmes*. Paris: Zones. 2018. pp. 11-15.

Matilda under the more recent archetype of the *femme fatale* to show her transgression dedicated to her emancipation by turning the situation to her advantage with Ambrosio.

### 1. Duality Feminine/Masculine

Matilda is a hybrid character in the novel, as she changes from one gender to another. The ambiguity around her character is present from her first apparition. She is introduced as the novice monk Rosario before revealing herself as a woman. Joseph Andriano in *Our Ladies of Darkness* uses cross-dressing to see her as an “anima figure<sup>167</sup>.” The concept of *anima* is elaborated by Jung and can be defined as part of the collective unconscious and which refers to the unconscious feminine side of a man<sup>168</sup>, its masculine equivalent for women being the *animus*. Therefore, she would be Ambrosio’s anima making her phantasmagorical. As Lewis barely portrays Matilda interacting with other characters then she could be an illusion from Ambrosio’s wavering psyche. As we have explained earlier, Ambrosio’s knowledge of women is based on the Bible in which Eve is depicted as the first temptress, and he may portray Matilda as Eve in his mind. However, Andriano also mentions that she is “not a compelling archetypal presence<sup>169</sup>” because of “subsequent masculinization as an external demonic aggressive force<sup>170</sup>.” Andriano compares her to Biondetta in *Le Diable Amoureux* by Jacques Cavotte (1772). Biondetta is presented as a feminine demon in the story but is introduced as a man before revealing her true nature.

*Both start as men subservient to a male master: one a page boy, the other a novice protégé. Both are loved as men, perhaps because each is an image of the male protagonist’s self [...] Like Biondetta, Matilda “flickers” between sexes, suggesting not a “transvestite game,” as Kiely puts it, 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<sup>171</sup>.*

With “this collapse of boundaries,” it seems legit to introduce the notion of androgyny for Matilda. She goes from the novice monk to the projection of an ideal of the Madonna in an icon in Ambrosio’s cell, to a “real woman,” to a powerful sorceress and eventually to an in-

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167 Andriano, Joseph. *Our Ladies of Darkness: Feminine Daemonology in Male Gothic Fiction*. University Park Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993. p. 33.

168 “Anima | Definition of Anima in English by Oxford Dictionaries.” *Oxford Dictionaries | English*, Oxford Dictionaries. Accessed 22 March 2019. <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/anima>>.

169 Andriano, Joseph. *Our Ladies of Darkness: Feminine Daemonology in Male Gothic Fiction*. *op.cit.* p. 37.

170 *Ibid.*

171 *Ibid.* p. 33.



cubus<sup>172</sup>. This also shows her inconstancy to fit a proper gender role, either masculine or feminine, which makes Andriano revisit his theory by evoking a manipulation from Lewis of the ambivalence between the bipolarity of the identities constituting the character of Matilda, depicting the ambiguity between fictive reality and the fantasy that she embodies in Ambrosio's mind. Nina da Vinci Nichols evokes this duality as the "ideal fantasy" in Ambrosio's mind:

*Therefore, as the strong woman who also becomes a non-judgemental helpmeet in sexual crimes, Matilda becomes the ideal fantasy figure for the male: in modern psychological terms, she represents the acceptance of a mother and the authority of a father, both enlisted in the service of the male libido. At the same time, to enslave her is to triumph over conscience which permits him to tyrannize others and prepares him for his bargain with the devil<sup>173</sup>.*

Matilda stands out by her independence from mentors or various protectors as it is the case with Antonia who is the complete opposite in the archetypal women in Gothic fiction but also in Ambrosio's perception of women. She firstly describes herself as a sensitive love-struck woman<sup>174</sup> who could fit the definition of the gothic heroine yet this image is an invention to trigger the monk's empathy. Matilda becomes a calculating woman who draws Ambrosio towards his decline, which recalls the characteristics of the Gothic villain. Consequently, it is easier to grant Matilda with features that are usually referred to as masculine. Rosario is often referred to with feminine character traits: "He answered their civilities with sweetness, but reserve<sup>175</sup>," "no voice sounded so sweet to him as did Rosario's<sup>176</sup>" or "this disposition to melancholy<sup>177</sup>." Sweetness, as well as reservation are mostly associated with femininity as it is perceived as the opposite of virility and openness for men. It is also mentioned that Rosario never removes his cowl from his head<sup>178</sup> which recalls Antonia's behaviour in the first chapter when she refuses to remove her veil.

In her relationship to Ambrosio, Matilda is seen as the mastermind of the foreshadowing derangement. She is much more powerful than her former identity may have suggested, which also makes her more frightening for the abbot especially when she suggests Ambrosio should approach Antonia via magic. Matilda becomes the dominant one which is perceived as the masculine role in a couple, and she openly challenges Ambrosio's authority:

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172 A male demon. Yet, if she is identified as a woman, we should mention her as a succubus.

173 Nichols, Nina da Vinci. "Place and Eros in Radcliffe, Lewis and Bronte", in Juliann E. Fleenor. *The Female Gothic*. Montreal: Eden Press. 1983. 187-206.

174 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk*. *op. cit.* pp. 51-52.

175 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk*. *op. cit.* p. 40.

176 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk*. *op. cit.* p. 41.

177 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk*. *op. cit.* p. 48.

178 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk*. *op. cit.* p. 40.

*'I am busy,' said he in a stern and hasty tone; 'leave me.' [...]*  
*'Forgive me, Ambrosio,' said she; 'for your own sake I must not obey not. [...] I have given up the claims of the mistress, but nothing shall prevail on me to give up those of a friend.'*  
*'Generous Matilda!' he replied, taking her hand, 'how far do you rise superior to the foibles of your sex! I have need for an adviser, and a confidant: [...] But to aid my pursuits – Ah! Matilda, it lies not in you power!'*  
*'It lies in no one's power but mine. Ambrosio, your secret is none to me [...]'<sup>179</sup>.*

In this dialogue, Matilda changes status. She is now treated almost as an equal to Ambrosio, who then considers her as a friend and an adviser but Matilda still tries to keep the monk in her grip. Andriano points out this step in the development of her character into “the masculine sorceress<sup>180</sup>,” to the extent of commanding demons: “The enemy of mankind is my slave, not my sovereign<sup>181</sup>.”

Maggie Kilgour depicts Matilda as a “rational demystifier<sup>182</sup>,” “an enlightened figure, able to control subterranean forces<sup>183</sup>.” The same phrase is also used to describe Lorenzo, which defines rationality as originally perceived as masculine. Then, she can be seen as a figure of the Enlightenment period that encourages to question everything as well as a challenge to the position of women in the eighteenth-century society. Kilgour states again that “[the] distinction between the sexes disturbed by the discovery that Rosario is a woman is reaffirmed by the discovery that the woman who has autonomy, reason, and authority is in reality a demon<sup>184</sup>.” Matilda’s duality generates various thoughts about the perception of women. Due to the diabolisation of transgressive women, autonomy, reason or authority are still not related to femininity in the late eighteenth century, which makes Matilda an innovating character for the feminist cause by showing the empowerment of women, though scary or uncanny for the first readers of the novel. The climax of this transition occurs when Ambrosio finalises his pact with Lucifer who reveals to him that Matilda was actually a devil sent to tempt him<sup>185</sup>.

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<sup>179</sup> Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p. 228.

<sup>180</sup> Andriano, Joseph. *Our Ladies of Darkness: Feminine Daemonology in Male Gothic Fiction. op.cit.* p. 36.

<sup>181</sup> Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p. 230.

<sup>182</sup> Kilgour, Maggie. *The Rise of the Gothic Novel. op. cit.* p. 152.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* pp. 374-375.

## 2. Matilda as a witch

The word *witch* mostly refers to “a woman thought to have magic powers, especially evil ones, popularly depicted as wearing a black cloak and pointed hat and flying on a broomstick<sup>186</sup>,” or “an ugly or unpleasant woman<sup>187</sup>” but also defines “a girl or woman who is bewitchingly attractive<sup>188</sup>.” The witch is thus linked to both the ideas of charm and incorrectness. Her capacity to charm can obviously be found in Matilda’s portrait as the Madonna. Indeed, Ambrosio is fascinated by this painting in which he admires the painter’s skill<sup>189</sup>. At first, there is no proper description of the Madonna’s painting, then later on, it is revealed that Matilda was the model for the Virgin Mary:

*What was his amazement at beholding the exact resemblance of his admired Madona! The same exquisite proportion of features, the same profusion of golden hair, heavenly eyes, and majesty of countenance adorned Matilda! [...] [...] yes, Ambrosio, in Matilda de Villanegas you see the original of your beloved Madona<sup>190</sup>.*

Therefore, Ambrosio’s representation of this figure of holiness is unconsciously influenced by the demoness even before properly meeting her. Matilda is portrayed as a schemer slithering her way towards her goals, which shows an independence of actions and a free-mind. “Charm” suits Matilda as her beauty and charisma provoke Ambrosio’s fascination but also the other monks<sup>191</sup>. Marie Mulvey-Roberts states that “the demonisation of woman as succubus, harpy, witch and any number of supernatural beings has located the female outside nature and beyond the natural order of things<sup>192</sup>.” The subversive portrayal of Matilda is based on the reception of *The Monk* in a given context. Matilda Jocelyn Gage is considered as one of the first feminists to use the figure of the witch in 1893 to denounce sexism: “When for “witches” we read “women,” we gain fuller comprehension of the cruelties inflicted by the church upon this portion of humanity<sup>193</sup>.” By the time of publication of *The Monk*, the genre of Gothic fiction is mostly represented by female authors which could be seen as a counterof-

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186 “Witch | Definition of Witch in English by Oxford Dictionaries.” *Oxford Dictionaries | English*, Oxford Dictionaries. Accessed 26 March 2019. <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/witch>>.

187 *Ibid.*

188 “Witch | Definition of Witch in English by Oxford Dictionaries.” *Oxford Dictionaries | English*, Oxford Dictionaries. Accessed 26 March 2019. <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/witch>>.

189 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p. 40.

190 *Ibid.* p. 73.

191 *Ibid.* p. 78.

192 Mulvey-Roberts, Marie. “The Female Gothic Body”, in Horner, Angela and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion. op.cit.* 106-119. p. 106.

193 Gage, Matilda J. *Woman, Church and State. A Historical Account of the Status of Woman Through the Christian Ages: With Reminiscences of the Matriarchate.* New York. 1893. p. 291.

fensive of male authors<sup>194</sup>. As Anne Williams concludes her article on “Wicked Women” in *Women and the Gothic*: “For the woman who writes is also a witch; she has the power to change the ways we think and we feel. She is patriarchy’s most formidable femme fatale<sup>195</sup>.”

Witch trials, in England, are under the jurisdiction of the State rather than the Church, yet “the distinction has nothing but a very relative meaning in a world where there was no possible alternative beside religious faith<sup>196</sup>.” The persecution of women in particular finds a justification in the *Malleus Malificarum* “The Hammer of Witches<sup>197</sup>,” in which its authors support the theory that a woman is less likely to keep faith because of the etymology of *femina* composed of *fe* “faith” and *minus* “weak<sup>198</sup>.” The recourse to magical rituals puts healers or “witches” in opposition to the Church and to God. This opposition between both remedies can be found in the novel when a snake bites Ambrosio. Father Pablos, in charge of the community’s health, is left powerless and decides to leave the monk to his agony. With the importance of religion at the time, the knowledge of medicine is in possession of the monks as they are the closest to a healer but also intermediaries of God. We also learn that Matilda has been taught about “the various sciences which curiosity had induced [her guardian] to explore<sup>199</sup>” by a “man of uncommon knowledge<sup>200</sup>” which could refer to an alchemist who made Matilda his disciple. Pacts with the devil are recurrent in trials of witches and in *The Monk* as well. Matilda explains that she has contracted pacts with fallen angels and devils in order to become more powerful<sup>201</sup> and to flee from the Inquisition<sup>202</sup>. The perception and fear of witches in the eighteenth-century are linked to the idea that their “devilish powers” could

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194 “When women dare to aim for independence, a war machine is settled to make them give up by extortion, intimidation or threat. According to the journalist Susan Faludi, all through history, every progress towards their emancipation, as feeble as it may be, has provoked a counteroffensive.” Chollet, Mona. *Sorcières: La puissance invaincue des femmes*. *op. cit.* p.58 (our translation): “Quand les femmes ont l’audace de prétendre à l’indépendance, une machine de guerre se met en place pour les y faire renoncer par le chantage, l’intimidation ou la menace. Pour la journaliste Susan Faludi, tout au long de l’histoire, chaque progrès dans leur émancipation, si timide soit-il, a suscité une contre-offensive.”

195 Williams, Anne. “Wicked Women” in Horner, Angela and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*. *op.cit.* p.103.

196 Chollet, Mona. *Sorcières : La puissance invaincue des femmes*. *op. cit.* p. 13. (our translation): “La distinction n’a d’ailleurs qu’un sens très relatif dans un monde où il n’existait pas d’en-dehors possible à la croyance religieuse.”

197 Kramer, Henry and Sprenger Jacob. *Le Marteau des sorcières*. 1486. Paris: Jérôme Million. 2014. pp. 162-166.

198 This theory has to be put back in context since *femina* is actually the vocative form of the latin *femininus* “woman,” which would actually come from an Indo-European root meaning “the one nursing, breastfeeding.”

199 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk*. *op. cit.* p.229.

200 *Ibid.*

201 *Ibid.* p. 229.

202 *Ibid.* p. 366.

overthrow Christian society. As Anne Williams explains in her article on “Wicked Women” in Gothic fiction, “[the] witchy women of Gothic fiction usually threaten not literal but more symbolic forms of castration: rebellion against their patriarchal roles as dutiful daughters, faithful wives and self-sacrificing mothers<sup>203</sup>.”

### 3. A femme fatale figure

A femme fatale is “an attractive and seductive woman, especially one who will ultimately cause distress to a man who becomes involved with her<sup>204</sup>.” The word “fatale” comes from the Latin *fatum* “destiny” and evokes an ineluctable fate from which men, involved with these women, cannot escape. This archetype has been largely developed and popularised as a very feminine and seductive woman with angelic features who manipulates the protagonist to lead him in dangerous situations. Gothic literature constituted the blueprint of this type of character by opposing them to the Gothic heroine. Marie Mulvey-Roberts evokes the duality between “Madona” and “whore” that “is fundamental to numerous readings of the female body within Gothic writing, which encompasses a world of binary oppositions<sup>205</sup>” based on bourgeois expectations. The Gothic anti-heroine is seen as a “masculine woman<sup>206</sup>” as she is driven by her passions and impulses, whose behaviour can be found in the Gothic villain. However, Diane Hoeveler gives the examples of “sexual predators like the voracious gothic stepmother in *A Sicilian Romance* or the overly passionate women who find themselves confined to convents in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*<sup>207</sup>” to show the emergence of the Gothic anti-heroine from diverse social backgrounds unlike the Gothic villain who is a man of power, often from the aristocracy:

*Always destroyed by the conclusion of the novel, these women represent the antithesis of the feminine bourgeois ideology. Their extreme libidinous emotions, adulterous passions and lusts, and intense desire for power and status doom them to a life of desperate and thwarted designs<sup>208</sup>.*

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203 Williams, Anne. “Wicked Women” in Horner, Angela and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*. *op.cit.* p.91.

204 ‘Femme Fatale | Definition of Femme Fatale in English by Oxford Dictionaries’. *Oxford Dictionaries | English*. Accessed 30 March 2019. <[https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/femme\\_fatale](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/femme_fatale)>.

205 Mulvey-Roberts, Marie. “The Female Gothic Body”, in Horner, Angela and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic*. *op.cit.* 106-119. p. 108.

206 Hoeveler, Diane. *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of the Gothic from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*. *op. cit.* p. 31.

207 *Ibid.*

208 Hoeveler, Diane. *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of the Gothic from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*. *op. cit.* p. 60.

The Femme Fatale is also an archetype becoming preeminent in a male-dominated context of artistic production as this type of woman embodies the fear of a growing female influence within the system. According to Wess Haubrich, the femme fatale “is pure lethal beauty, but she is intelligent enough to use that beauty and her cunning and intellect to her advantage. In this way, the femme fatale shares some characteristics with what we would call “strong women” today<sup>209</sup>.” This analysis points out that intelligence and cleverness which are also qualities designating the gothic heroine. This “lethal beauty” hypnotises and fascinates, like the witch using her charms to reduce the vigilance of their male target and prevent them from acting. Mulvey-Roberts<sup>210</sup> explains that the figure of the Femme Fatale would originate in Greek mythology with Medusa, one of the Gorgon sisters, who used to be a very beautiful woman punished by the goddess Athena for violating her sanctuary, and cursed to petrify whoever looks at her in the eyes, which emphasises the “lethal beauty” of the Femme Fatale.

Matilda’s power of seduction over Ambrosio is no longer to be proven. For Ambrosio, she represents at the same time the innocent woman who became a vile temptress and the assistant for his darkest deeds. Matilda may be seen as an analogy of Eve<sup>211</sup>, because she is the first woman Ambrosio knows<sup>212</sup>. If the garden of the convent can be perceived as a Garden of Eden, the scene of temptation is adapted with Ambrosio as Adam and Matilda as Eve tempting him not with a fruit but with her breasts:

*She had torn open her habit, and her bosom was half exposed. The weapon’s point rested upon her left breast: and, oh! That was such a breast! The moon-beams darting full upon it enabled the monk to observe its dazzling whiteness: his eye dwelt with insatiable avidity upon the beauteous orb: a sensation till then unknown filled his heart with a mixture of anxiety and delight; a raging fire shot through every limb; the blood boiled in his veins, and a thousand wild wishes bewildered his imagination. ‘Hold!’ he cried, in a hurried, faltering voice; ‘I can resist no longer! Stay then, enchantress! Stay for my destruction!’<sup>213</sup>*

In this extract, Matilda’s threat to commit suicide ends in her clothes being partly cut and exhibiting her breasts. She is then immediately sexualised by the reaction of the monk, who is completely captivated and paralysed in awe. Femininity is also shown by the white “beauteous orb” that may also refer to the moon shining above both characters, which astra is

209 Haubrich, Wess. ‘The Femme Fatale: The Archetype and Character over the Years.’ *Medium*, 5 June 2018. Accessed 29 March 2019. <<https://medium.com/@HaubrichNoir/on-the-femme-fatale-where-did-she-come-from-where-is-she-going-1fe271defd2d>>.

210 Mulvey-Roberts, Marie. “The Female Gothic Body” in Horner, Angela and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*. *op.cit.* p. 106.

211 *Ibid.*

212 In the Bible, the verb “know” is also used as an euphemism for sexual intercourse.

213 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk*. *op. cit.* p. 60.

associated with women and magic. Moreover, Matilda points the dagger to her left breast which insists on her malignity as left is translated *sinistra* in Latin and is traditionally associated with bad things in Roman civilisation, representing the “forbidden fruit” for the monk. If Ambrosio’s approach towards women is limited to the mere admiration of the painting of a divinity, Matilda represents at the same time the figure of the mother, by her representation as the Madona, the idealistic virgin, the sinful mistress and the temptress.

In this second part, the purpose has been to show the opposition between conformism and transgression perceived and depicted in *The Monk*. With the importance of the religious context, the notion of sin is never very far in the novel. It is always easy for the characters to transgress the rules even if most of them intend to follow them to the letter. However, it is interesting to notice that patriarchy is not completely depicted and leaves room for the representation of smaller groups directed by powerful women, which still gives them more visibility than what could be expected from a “non-feminist novel.” The characters must comply with religious, social and literary constraints, emphasised by the fairytale’s archetypes that they are associated to. In comparison with these female characters, men in the novel are less complex and consequently match even more the stereotypical images of men conveyed by the society of the Enlightenment period and through literature. Yet, the power of women is also counter-balanced by their inclination towards transgression, with Mother St. Agatha for instance, and by a diabolisation of those who yearn for more independence and emancipation as is the case with the character of Matilda, who is considered as a temptress, a witch, but also, from another perspective, the starting point to another point of view on women towards more emancipation.

### III – Is *The Monk* a Proto-Feminist Work?

The feminist commitment of an author is a rather recent debate that takes its origins in the different waves of feminism. In the eighteenth century, this approach is at its very early stages which leads us to consider whether *The Monk* could be considered as “proto-feminism.” *The Monk*’s publication coincides with the first proto-feminist writings with *A Vindication of the Rights for Women* published in 1794. Therefore, it might be interesting to study how this essay may find an echo in Gothic literature. In the first part, we will question the title, “The Monk”, to interpret who it can be really referring to. Then in the second part, we will focus on the evolution of female characters in Gothic fiction after *The Monk* by proposing an overview of various writings through the nineteenth century, so as to show *The Monk*’s influence on women in subsequent pieces of fiction. In the third part, we will concentrate on the link between Gothic and proto-feminism by studying Mary Wollstonecraft’s writing, then the importance of Female Gothic in the development of the genre and its implication within proto-feminist theory to eventually deal with *The Monk*’s modern reception and question its proto-feminist dimension.

#### A) “The” Monk

*The Monk* takes place in a convent, consequently the reference to a religious position seems obvious. Ambrosio, the abbot, is designated as the main protagonist of the story as we follow his fall throughout the main plot. Even though this dissertation focuses on women in this novel, it might be interesting to concentrate on the depiction of the monk as he also plays a major part in the development of other feminine characters such as Matilda or Antonia. Moreover, due to Matilda’s disguise, the meaning of the title might not be as obvious as expected and could also refer to this character instead of Ambrosio, which would bring women to the forefront of the story.

##### 1. Ambrosio as The monk

The leading character of the novel is Ambrosio, the abbot of the Capuchin monastery adjoining St Clare Convent in Madrid. His position as a monk explains the title of the book, which emphasises the importance of the religious setting and his patriarchal position within the abbey. The function of a monk is to be part of a male religious community of men



therefore masculinity is supposed to predominate in the characterisation of the protagonists who are part of this social group. At the beginning, Ambrosio fits the traditional figure of the abbot who is devoted to religion and to God and respects the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. The parishioners hold him as an example of holiness and of purity as his nickname 'The Man of Holiness' would suggest, Lorenzo's description in the first chapter underlines that as well:

*[The] monks, who find their account in the favour which is shewn to their establishment from respect to him, have not hesitated to publish, that he is a present to them from the Virgin. [...] In the whole course of his life he has never 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<sup>214</sup>.*

This description emphasises the fact that Ambrosio has unknown origins at the beginning of the novel. He was brought to the monastery at a young age with no memories of his family and has grown and learnt everything he knows, including flawless morals and a biased conception of women and femininity. This point of view is emphasised through his association with the Virgin Mary, justified by his lack of genealogy (an "Immaculate Conception") and experience of the outside.

We can also stress Ambrosio's feminisation. Unlike other male characters, the monk is physically described<sup>215</sup>, which enables an objectification through an external perspective. Consequently, he is put in a feminine and chaste position : his ignorance of the outer world and his innocence of mind<sup>216</sup> link him even more with Antonia, the object of his desire and his sister. Ambrosio's feminisation is amplified with his relationship with Matilda through an inversion of gender. Kate Adams, quoting Steven Blackmore, explains this idea : Ambrosio's weakness makes him "vulnerable to temptation and hypocrisy<sup>217</sup>." The monk is the unexperienced, unsure and weak virgin seduced by the vicious and devilish Matilda. The inversion of gender is emphasised when Ambrosio hesitates to get help by darker forces. Matilda qualifies his mind as "esteemed so great and so valiant, [though it] proves to be feeble, puerile, and grovelling, a slave to vulgar errors, and weaker than a Woman's<sup>218</sup>."

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214 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* pp. 19-20.

215 *Ibid.* p. 20.

216 Adams, Kate. 'Anti-Catholicism in Matthew Lewis' *The Monk*'. *VAMPS: Journal of Absurdity and Horror: op. cit.* p. 72.

217 Blackmore, Steven. "Matthew Lewis's Black Mass: Sexual, Religious Inversion in *The Monk*." *Studies in the Novel*. 30.3 (1998): 521-539. p. 522.

218 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p. 230.

Matilda establishes a clear distinction between the masculine mind perceived as “great” and “valiant” and the feminine mind perceived as “feeble, puerile and grovelling” showing Ambrosio’s complete submission, recalling the Angel of the House’s devotion to her husband. He is even considered as less of a woman by his behaviour as he reveals all his own human frailty when Matilda asks him to behave “like a man.” Kate Adams also points out Ambrosio’s death as the “final nail in the coffin of his masculinity<sup>219</sup>” as Lucifer drops Ambrosio on the rocks as an “unmistakable phallic allusion<sup>220</sup>.” She mentions his submissive state especially after he concluded the pact. His deadly fall also represents a moral Fall symbolised by the underground vaults where his desires have increased. This can also relate Ambrosio to the Fallen Woman. He loses his status as a “man of Holiness” by embracing his pride and yielding to his own sexual impulses. The feminisation of Ambrosio by the author completely destabilises the usual representation of the monk as a morally infallible masculine representation of the Church. Therefore, we might consider another protagonist as the monk whom the title could be referring to.

## 2. A monk can hide another one

The other central character that could be seen as the monk of the title is Matilda, pretending to be Rosario. The blending of genders can be spotted in the name “Rosario”, that is feminine in Spanish and masculine in Italian and associated with the Madona<sup>221</sup>, which reinforces the infiltration of the feminine in a highly masculine space and institution. Jérôme Prieur evokes Matilda as “The” monk because of her various personalities as she becomes a “Madonna’s mask, dressed-up novice, debauched nun, imaginary sister, passionate lover, devilish mistress [...] and will everlastingly remain a temptation<sup>222</sup>” unlike Ambrosio who only appears as a monk in the grip of his demons and desires.

Matilda can also be seen as “The monk” because she is the triggering agent of Ambrosio’s fall in the main plot through their relationship<sup>223</sup>, and her painting of the Madona<sup>224</sup>. The figure of the monk, of the novice in particular, is sexualised and therefore

219 Adams, Kate. ‘Anti-Catholicism in Matthew Lewis’ *The Monk*’. *VAMPS: Journal of Absurdity and Horror*. *op. cit.* p. 73.

220 *Ibid.*

221 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk*. *op. cit.* p. 379: “Again Lewis confuses Spain and Italy.”

222 Prieur, Jérôme. “M.G. Lewis. D’un moine moite”, *Le Nouveau Magazine Littéraire*. 552 February 2015: 78-79. (our translation): “Masque de Madone, novice travesti, religieuse débauchée, soeur imaginaire, amante passionnée, maîtresse diabolique [...] et restera à jamais une tentation.”

223 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk*. *op. cit.* p. 38.

224 *Ibid.* p. 73.

represents a figure of temptation and of transgression, regardless of one's gender, in Gothic literature. By letting Rosario enter and stay in the monastery, Ambrosio lets corruption, sin and evil enter the monastery, which triggers the plot of the novel. Thus, it could be said that the triggering event has already happened before the beginning of the novel in order to set the optimum context for Ambrosio's unavoidable fall.

According to François Angelier, British Gothic novels shaped the monk into a "phantasmagoric embodiment of perversion<sup>225</sup>" leading to a "violent and erotic fantasy, even a fetichism of the religious figures<sup>226</sup>." The monk represented as a lubricious figure of debauchery recalls the sexualisation of the archetype of the Femme Fatale that Matilda embodies. From the reader's and Ambrosio's perspective, she represents the main sexual frustration and object of desire of Ambrosio. This is crystallized in the portrait of the Madona and his fantasy over specific sexually connoted parts of the body such as the bosom for example:

*[How] graceful is the turn of that head! what sweetness, yet that majesty in her divine eyes! How softly her cheek reclines upon her hand! [...] if such 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! gracious God, should I then resist the temptation<sup>227</sup>?*

Matilda may also represent duality towards monks and nuns who are at the same time figures of repulsion but also of twisted passion. She indeed represents sexual desire but also a desire for empowerment and emancipation for female readers because of her grip on the abbot, and by extension, on the monastery, which puts her in a powerful position as the lead character of the story and enables us to see her as "The Monk".

The figure of the monk is also usually seen as a person with a flawless faith in God. Matilda appears more faithful to her real nature as a demoness, than Ambrosio. She distinguishes herself by her confidence in comparison to Ambrosio's indecisiveness. If we keep the idea of her being "The Monk", she seems more legitimate than Ambrosio in her commitment as a "dark monk" and a determined sorceress devoted to Lucifer than he is as a conventional friar. Her influence over him may echo the abbot's charm and authority over the parishioners and the community of monks in the first chapter.

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225 Angelier, François. "À quel saint se vouer ?", *Le Nouveau Magazine Littéraire. op. cit.* p. 8. (our translation): "[...]volontiers antipapistes, les romans noirs anglais font du moine l'incarnation fantasmagique de la perversion."

226 *Ibid.* (our translation): "Le genre est à l'origine de tout une fantasmagique érotique et violente, pourquoi pas un fétichisme, des figures religieuses."

227 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p. 39.

Mathilda could represent “The Monk” as a photonegative of Ambrosio because of the parallels that can be drawn between them. They are both from unknown backgrounds<sup>228</sup> and are, in appearance, driven by lust and power to achieve their goals. When in doubt, Ambrosio confesses to Matilda, just as the nuns confess to him, thus she has the role as an adviser and a confidant. As a result, Matilda is as important in the novel as Ambrosio is for the community. He could also be seen as the masculine equivalent of the Gothic heroine who will evolve in a transgressive context and potentially transgress as well. Such a parallel can be seen with the discovery of his filiation with Antonia when Lucifer states “[that] Antonia whom you violated, was your Sister! That Elvira whom you murdered, gave you birth<sup>229</sup>!” Such a revelation completes his fragmentary characterisation, defines him as a villain and reintroduces lineage.

Matilda is the key-character who reinforces the representation of women as active characters with a direct impact on the plot (in comparison with female protagonists from the subplot). However, though she may be the person whom the title refers to, Ambrosio remains the main protagonist for most readers, as the story is built around his fall. Nevertheless she is pulling the strings and paves the way to a feminisation of the figure of the monk on the one hand and to the evolution towards feminine archetypes of female Gothic villains on the other hand.

## **B) Towards more subversive feminine characters**

Matilda is one of the most important feminine characters in *the Monk*. She stands out through her subversiveness and her embodiment of the Femme Fatale archetype. Being one of the major Gothic novels, *The Monk* represents a landmark for succeeding Gothic writings, as Maurice Lévy situates the end of the first movement in 1824. Therefore, the feminine characters of the novel left their mark in the characterisation of other Gothic characters. The nineteenth century also witnesses the evolution of the genre with the popularisation of fantastic creatures, such as vampires or monsters for example, the success of *penny dreadfuls* in all social classes. From Ann Radcliffe and Charlotte Dacre to Sheridan Le Fanu and Bram Stoker, nineteenth-century Gothic literature carries representations of the condition of women.

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<sup>228</sup>Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p. 19 and p. 40.

<sup>229</sup>Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p. 374-375.

## 1. Immediate descendants: *The Italian*, Ann Radcliffe and *Zofloya*, Charlotte Dacre

The publication of *The Monk* in 1796 marks a turning point in Gothic literature because of its critical reception among readers from various social spheres. This popularity led to several works directly inspired by Matthew Gregory Lewis's writing. In this part, we will focus on two works inspired by *The Monk*, *The Italian* by Ann Radcliffe and *Zofloya* by Charlotte Dacre. They can be opposed in the re-appropriation and reinterpretation of the plot of the original story. With *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Radcliffe's influence is a fact and she established the feminine archetypes of the Gothic genre.

Ann Radcliffe writes and publishes *The Italian, or the Confessional of the Black Penitents* in 1797, a year after the publication of *The Monk*. This novel shows similarities with *The Monk* in the plot and the archetypes. The intertextuality can be seen in key moments such as encounters between main characters that recall the first and final chapters of *The Monk*. We could also mention the major influence of religion through the priest Schedoni and the Inquisition. Unlike Ambrosio, Schedoni is motivated by power and Ann Radcliffe associates him with Friar Jerome from *The Castle of Otranto* instead of Lewis' monk. Maurice Lévy suggests that Ann Radcliffe wrote *The Italian* as a response to Matthew Gregory Lewis to show that *The Monk's* storyline could have been depicted in a more conventional tone<sup>230</sup> through "the limited media of a chaste, rigorously human and... British imagination<sup>231</sup>."

Radcliffe's re-appropriation of *The Monk's* plot enables a redefinition of her Gothic heroine who then becomes even more independent from the etiquette and stereotypes of her gender until metamorphosing into the Gothic antiheroine. Ellena's preoccupations are no longer associated with marital life, which differs from the Angel in the House. *The Italian* narrates her rite of passage from childhood into adulthood. Diane Hoeveler focuses on the nature of this rite of passage that goes from "pubescent sexuality to full status as an adult woman<sup>232</sup>." It will make Ellena become "a gothic feminist heroine" as she manages to

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230 Wright, Angela. "Heroines in Flight: Narrating Invisibility and Maturity in Women's Gothic Writing of the Romantic Period", in Ed. Horner, Avril and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*. op. cit. pp. 21-22.: "The Italian does not give its readership much cause to hope for any deviation from the conventional Gothic heroism."

231 Lévy, Maurice. *Le roman "gothique" anglais 1764-1824*. op. cit. p. 258 (our translation): "il reste vraisemblable qu'elle [Ann Radcliffe] ait voulu donner la réplique à Lewis, et montrer au monde ce qu'il était possible de faire avec les moyens limités d'une imagination chaste, strictement humaine et... anglaise."

232 Hoeveler, Diane. *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*. op. cit. p. 103.

emancipate from her family circle, though her parentage is unknown for most of the story, and though she eventually marries Vicentio who, then, becomes her protector<sup>233</sup>.

As mentioned earlier, Radcliffe and Lewis mutually influenced each other with the difference that “Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian* (1797) implicitly rebuked ‘Monk’ Lewis’s scandalous improprieties<sup>234</sup>.” The taboo of sexuality depicted in *The Monk* is only subtly suggested in *The Italian*. In the eighteenth century, “sexuality” only refers to the “desire for sex”, yet nowadays, we can also reflect on “sexuality” as sexual orientation. According to Stephanie Foreman<sup>235</sup>, Ellena is a bisexual character, attracted to both Olivia and Vicentio: “Vivaldi’s inability to get Ellena out of his mind mirrors the thought process Ellena has about Olivia. [...] Radcliffe’s use of parallel storylines once again implies a bisexuality in Ellena’s character<sup>236</sup>.” However, this attraction towards the nun is also associated with incest, as we discover that Olivia is actually Ellena’s mother. Radcliffe thus created a protagonist who would fit the usual description of a gothic heroine but who also becomes subversive without actually committing a major crime against morality.

Motherhood is shown through two different patterns in *The Italian*. The redefinition of the gothic heroine also depends on her comparison with older mother figures. Ellena can be opposed to the Marchesa di Vivaldi, Vicentio’s mother. The latter represents the conservative values of marriage in the same social background. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik<sup>237</sup> also associate her with the *The Monk*’s Prioress because of their respective cruelty towards younger women, “the vigour and the energy of the older woman, the Marchesa di Vivaldi, are focused [...] on the murder of Ellena de Rosalba, the young woman loved by her son<sup>238</sup>.” The Marchesa therefore embodies the negative stereotype of older women in Gothic romances who stand for the witch figure according to Second-Wave Feminist thinkers. This corresponds to the stereotype of “the malicious powerful older woman<sup>239</sup>” that will later be used in characters such as Miss Havisham in Dickens’ *Great Expectations* (1861). The other pattern is depicted through sister Olivia, Ellena’s mother, who is supposed to be dead. The Fallen

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233 *Ibid.* p. 104.

234 Williams, Anne. “Wicked Women”, in Horner, Angela and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion. op. cit.* p. 98.

235 Foreman, Stephanie. “The Bisexuality of Ellena in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian*”, *New Views on Gender*. 15.1. (2015): 38-41. p. 41 <<https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/iusbgender/article/view/13612>> Accessed on 28 March 2019.

236 *Ibid.* p. 39.

237 Horner, Avril and Zlosnik, Sue. “No Country for Old Women: Gender, Age and the Gothic”, in Horner, Angela and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic. op. cit.* pp. 185-186.

238 *Ibid.*

239 *Ibid.*

Woman, in *The Italian*, is a rather passive character since she is stuck in the convent after she has been raped by her former husband's brother, the man who pretends to be Schedoni. The "sentence" in this situation is questionable if the feminist point of view is taken into account as it can be considered as an illustration of the concept of slut-shaming<sup>240</sup>, that includes the concept of the Fallen Woman as well. However, this concept is anachronistic given the time of publication. As Diane Hoeveler points out, the action of *The Italian* is supposed to be contemporary to Radcliffe's time of writing, England during the 1790s. The context of the north of Italy in 1764 with the presence of the Inquisition, had vanished over a century before:

*The psychological action of The Italian occurs in the same time and place as do all Radcliffe's novels – England, 1790-97. And once again we have a melodrama of gender and ideology played out in a supposedly safely distanced historical field. The historical parallels are significant, however, for what they reveal about the author's cultural anxieties*<sup>241</sup>.

Ann Radcliffe sets her story as a testimony read by English travellers settled in Italy. This configuration situates this plotline in another uncanny context where other rules apply concerning social decorum, and gender expectations. The male point of view is still the first choice of focalisation, as the testimony is supposedly translated by a priest or a male novice, and the priority is given to Vicentio's partial gaze within the narrative. Thus, Ann Radcliffe "always makes us aware of those masculine frames of meaning<sup>242</sup>" by conditioning the plot's framing through the 'Law of the Father', that Anne Williams related to the 'Gothic myth' within the patriarchal family. The 'Law of the Father' is conceptualised by Lacan as "the leading principle of the cultural order: 'sexual difference is indeed the "key" to the secrets of the patriarchal power structure<sup>243</sup>.'" Within this frame, the perception of women is biased by the male gaze even though the author is a woman. This male gaze can be seen in Vicentio deifying Ellena in the same way that Lorenzo compares Agnes to an angel for example.

*Zofloya, or The Moor* is considered as one of the most elaborate works derived from Lewis. Charlotte Dacre writes and publishes it in 1806 under the pseudonym "Rosa Matilda"

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240 Slut-shaming is defined as "the action or fact of stigmatizing a woman for engaging in behaviour judged to be promiscuous or sexually provocative." However, the term in this context remains anachronistic since it has been clearly defined during the era of the Second-Wave feminism.

241 Hoeveler, Diane. "Gendering Vindication", in Hoeveler, Diane. *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*. *op. cit.* p. 104.

242 Wright, Angela. "Heroines in Flight: Narrating Invisibility and Maturity in Women's Gothic Writing of the Romantic Period", in Horner, Avril and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*. *op. cit.* p. 27.

243 Talairach-Vielmas, Laurence. "Madwomen and Attics", in Horner, Avril and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*. *op. cit.* p. 33.

which echoes both the personas of Matilda and Rosario. *Zofloya* was also vividly criticised for its provocative questioning of social rules and its depicting of interracial relationships, especially as the author was a woman as it is underlined in this review from the *Annual Review and History of Literature* published in 1806:

*We are sorry to remark that The Monk seems to have been made the model, as well of the style, as of the story. There is a voluptuousness of language and allusion, prereading these volumes, which we would have hoped, that the delicacy of the female pen would have refused to trace; and there is an exhibition of wantonness and harlotry, which we should have hoped, that the delicacy of the female mind, would have been shocked to imagine.*<sup>244</sup>

According to this account, the polemical aspects of the novel are more questionable as the author is a woman. Charlotte Dacre follows Lewis' school of horror by appropriating features from the *male Gothic*, which puts to the fore the question of gender in the characterisation of the protagonists but also relates to the status of women as writers.

A lot of similarities with *The Monk* can be seen in the main plot of *Zofloya* as well. The main protagonist grows infatuated with an innocent character and accomplishes his or her deeds with the help of a supernatural tempter. At the end, she is caught because of her avidity and bad actions and tragically dies at the hand of a devilish figure. The triangle between Victoria, Berenza and Henriquez echoes the Bleeding Nun story but is slightly more successful as Victoria manages to marry her first lover. However, Henriquez is not as debauched as Otto is in *The Monk* and Victoria is not killed after murdering her husband. Victoria and Lilla are put in competition exactly as Matilda and Antonia are perfect opposites. Another similarity can be found in Lilla's abduction and imprisonment in a cave that recalls Agnes' and Antonia's imprisonments. Moreover, Ambrosio is still part of the story as Signora di Modena's gardener who enables Victoria to leave her aunt's house, which is her first act of defiance. Charlotte Dacre proposes a Gothic story that mocks Radcliffe's model of writing by going further in the horror of subversion.

Unlike her peers, Victoria does not morally nor physically match the traditional representation of a Gothic heroine. She is described as dark-skinned, with raven hair in comparison to the fair and pale Lilla. Victoria has a natural inclination towards evil: she embodies "the earlier, uncivilised, aristocratic woman – vain, lustful, libidiously

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<sup>244</sup> Review of *Zofloya* in *Annual Review and History of Literature*, vol.5, 1806. Taken from Labourg, Alice. "Zofloya ou la subversion gothique du "genre"." in Le Fustec, Claude and Marret, Sophie. *La fabrique du genre : (dé)constructions du féminin et du masculin dans les arts et la littérature anglophones*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008. p. 103.



aggressive, actively and openly sexual, and violent<sup>245</sup>,” in complete opposition with the well-behaved, innocent and virgin Gothic heroine embodied by Lilla who represents the “new bourgeois ideal of the “civilised” domestic idol, professionally girl-woman<sup>246</sup>.” Alice Labourg explains Victoria’s open sexuality by the fact that masculine vice becomes Victoria’s feminine virtue in the novel. To do that, she compares her with Ambrosio<sup>247</sup>. She disturbs even more the nineteenth-century feminine standards in a patriarchal society through her relationship with Zofloya that also questions the perception of interracial relationships<sup>248</sup>.

Charlotte Dacre uses the patterns of the *male Gothic* to introduce questions about the place of women in the family and in society. Diane Hoeveler still considers *Zofloya* as a misogynistic novel, yet this misogyny could also be seen as a display of the two contemporary extremes of femininity. Laurina, Victoria’s mother, who leaves her husband and children to elope with Count Ardolph, does not quite fit the standards. Her departure from home is seen as one of the reasons why Victoria turned vicious and debauched: she was influenced by a “morally compromised mother<sup>249</sup>” who sank “into the deepest form of vice imaginable<sup>250</sup>.” Her elopement is the tragic triggering factor foreshadowing her husband’s death, her children’s deviation and eventually her own passing caused by the true intentions of her lover. The usual association of mothers with conservatism depicts them as models for their children. Thus, Victoria would, after all, imitate her mother in her path of debauchery. However, Laurina is tempted by Count Ardolph, an evil figure, leaves her family after multiple attempts of seduction from him and starts her life of immorality under the influence of this man. Victoria, on the contrary, is already rebellious and licentious by nature, therefore she is not completely influenced by a nefarious person or entity to commit her deeds, but is rather moved and motivated by her impetuosity and her impulses.

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245 Hoeveler, Diane. *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*. op. cit. p. 148.

246 *Ibid*.

247 Labourg, Alice. “*Zofloya* ou la subversion gothique du “genre”.” in Le Fustec, Claude and Marret, Sophie. *La fabrique du genre : (dé)constructions du féminin et du masculin dans les arts et la littérature anglophones*. op. cit. p. 109.

248 Hoeveler, Diane. *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*. op. cit. p. 149.: “A woman who would sexually pursue not simply one man but two – and brothers at that – is a woman who has to be full of the devil. And the devil is not simply represented as black, of a lower class, and foreign; he is empowered by functioning in league, as one, with a corrupt aristocratic and foreign woman.”

249 Wright, Angela. “Heroines in Flight: Narrating Invisibility and Maturity in Women’s Gothic Writing of the Romantic Period”, in Horner, Angela and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*. op. cit. p. 27.

250 Hoeveler, Diane. *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*. op. cit. 123-146. p. 147.

The depiction of her main protagonist as a gothic antiheroine enables Dacre to redefine the expectations of a literary female character. By not matching the bourgeois ideal and even triumphing from it<sup>251</sup>, Victoria embodies a different kind of femininity that relates to the Gothic villain, usually reserved to secondary characters before. Therefore we could consider the gender roles inversion of this novel. Most women in *Zofloya* are compared to men with behaviours or attributes connoted as feminine. Victoria's father becomes a mother figure when his wife leaves with her lover. Henriquez is less impulsive than Victoria. This inversion is even more obvious in Megalena's and Leonardo's relationship. She is more driven by her thirst for vengeance when he is more composed and is asked to swap his quill for a dagger, a phallic symbol, to gain Megalena's affection. Victoria, despite the artistic activities attributed to the Gothic heroines, actually enjoys shedding blood, if it is to her advantage. The dagger becomes "the male instrument of aristocratic revenge in a moral code redefined in feminine terms<sup>252</sup>."

## 2. The Female Vampire: *Carmilla*, Sheridan Le Fanu and *Dracula*, Bram Stoker

The figure of the vampire is universally portrayed in European folklore as a "corpse supposed to leave its grave at night to drink the blood of the living by biting their necks with pointed canine teeth<sup>253</sup>". The most famous work that conveys the depiction of vampires as we portray them nowadays is, without hesitation, *Dracula* written by Bram Stoker and published in 1897. The author depicts an old blood-thirsty male vampire from Transylvania. However, the vampire had already become an important figure in literature since Polidori's *Vampyre* (1819) with the popularization of the romantic vampire. The archetype describes a charismatic male aristocratic fiend coming from Eastern Europe slithering among the upper-class in hunt for new preys. In the Victorian imagination, especially with the influence of Orientalism, the vampire is seen as the uncanny Outsider able to subvert British society through all the means available to him, from the most obvious to the most intimate. We will focus on the representation of female vampires, in *Carmilla* (1872) by Sheridan Le Fanu and *Dracula*.

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251 Hoeveler, Diane. *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*. *op. cit.* p. 148.

252 Labourg, Alice. "Zofloya ou la subversion gothique du "genre"." in Le Fustec, Claude and Marret, Sophie. *La fabrique du genre : (dé)constructions du féminin et du masculin dans les arts et la littérature anglophones*. *op. cit.* p. 113.

253 "Vampire | Definition of Vampire in English by Oxford Dictionaries." *Oxford Dictionaries | English*, Oxford Dictionaries, <en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/vampire>. Accessed on 24 May 2019.

With the female vampire, the monstrosity of unconventional women becomes more figurative than it is suggested in previous Gothic works of fiction, in which these women's behaviours are only associated to their background. This archetype plays on the duality between fear and desire represented in contradiction with the passivity and conformity expected by social conventions.

*Female vampires destabilise such comfortable, culturally inflected investments and complacencies and reveal them as aspects of constructed gender identity resulting from social and cultural hierarchies. [...] In culture and literature, women are frequently constructed as bearers of moral good and represent the conventional securities of family, home, nation, purity, heredity, economic security, health. When women reject this template of goodness, the forces of order offload social, bodily, and spiritual terrors onto the demonised figure of woman. Each of these – the conventional order and the demonised Other – are fictional constructed<sup>254</sup>.*

The rejection of feminine standards and the association with various taboos demonise and ostracise women from their society as it is depicted in *Carmilla*. This fiction depicts one of the first lesbian vampires, confronting both the subjects of women's sexuality and of homosexuality, through the character of Carmilla, a feminine 'Un-dead', who seduces young women to feast on their blood.

By being at the frontier in-between the living world and the potentially immoral world of the dead where social expectations do not apply, the vampire is at the limit of transgression and blurs the limits previously established. Therefore, they embody supernatural representations of the Fallen Women who are "dead" for the society because of their behaviour, but still "alive" as fully-fleshed human beings. Laura's childhood memories and her encounter with Carmilla stand for a ritual of coming to age where the vampire embodies the transition to an adult age with an emphasis on female sexual awakening. Alison Milbank<sup>255</sup> points out the comparison made by Carmilla of young women with "caterpillars" who eventually become butterflies. The female vampire oscillates between seduction and repulsion, by staying uncannily young thanks to the consumption of blood.

If female closeness is more accepted than male closeness in the nineteenth century, in Le Fanu's work, it is also associated with an openly-lesbian vampire who also conveys androgyny to the vampire:

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254 Wisker, Gina. "Female Vampirism", in Horner, Angela and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Guide*. *op. cit.* 150-165. p. 151.

255 Milbank, Alison. "Victorian Gothic in English novels and stories, 1830-1880", in Hogle, Jerrold E. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. *op. cit.* 145-165. p. 163.

*The crucial issue is gender signification. Male writers are identifying with female characters. [...] Since the lamia's victim (usually male) is in a submissive, even masochistic role, which is socioculturally defined as feminine, he may as well have a female name: he is revealed as "Laura". [...] The gender reversals in the vampire tale, moreover, reflect the confusion caused by the tension between archetypal androgyny – the instinctive tendency to fuse the opposites – and stereotypical dualism, the sociocultural tendency to polarize them<sup>256</sup>.*

In the same way as Matilda in *The Monk*, the female vampire is masculinised because of the reversal of gendered roles<sup>257</sup>. The eponymous character is masculinised by her nature as a vampire and especially by her grip on Laura in a game of domination and submission. In this relationship, superiority is associated with Carmilla's powers whereas Laura, being "a simple human being", appears as plain and subdued by her lover's ascendancy on her. Carmilla, therefore, is literally "empowered" despite her transgression from the norms. Her "abnormality" is also emphasised by her ability to turn into an animal. Maria Mulvey-Roberts underlines this association between women and supernatural creatures:

*The demonisation of woman as succubus, harpy, witch and any number of supernatural beings has located the female outside nature and beyond the natural order of things. In Western religious, philosophical traditions, the alignment of the female with the monstrous or animal body has helped demote the category of woman in social and political hierarchies<sup>258</sup>.*

Carmilla has the ability to turn into a black feline with which she shares her ambiguity as a vampire. When the vampire is both dead and alive, the cat was sacred before the Judaeo-Christian influence on the Western World and demonised at the same time by being associated with the devil, bad omens and witches, especially black cats. However, the feline figure is used to emphasise Carmilla's bestiality which marginalises her even more. It is also interesting to notice the affirmation of a specific gender for the creature. The absence of definition of a specific gender among vampires also shows a non-established gender-based hierarchy evincing the possibility of a gender inequality as it is the case in patriarchal societies.

From the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, the Gothic genre evolves from Romanticism to Dark Romanticism especially, and literature gradually become more accessible to a more significant and popular audience thanks to the weekly publication of *Penny Dreadfuls* featuring sensational stories of adventures, crime and detention with many

<sup>256</sup> Andriano, Joseph. *Our Ladies of Darkness: Feminine Daemonology in Male Gothic Fiction*. *op. cit.* p. 99.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.* p. 101.

<sup>258</sup> Mulvey-Roberts, Marie. "The Female Gothic Body", in Horner, Angela and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic: an Edinburgh Guide*. *op. cit.* 106-119. p. 106.

illustrations. Consequently, archetypes of characters become more explicit and unambivalent. At the same time, feminism slowly starts to emerge, leading to depict the monstrosity of women as a threat to the balance of society as a more visual content, understood by most of its audience, whether it is educated or not. The use of more popular references also differs from early Gothic works published at the end of the eighteenth century, such as *the Monk*, in which the notions of evil and sin are less defined by one or another archetypal element or character. A new archetype of femininity emerges from the drastic distinction between the Angel of the House and the Fallen Woman due to an evolution of mores during the nineteenth century.

The concept of the New Woman was intellectualised in *The New Aspect of the Woman Question* written by Sarah Grand and Ouida, in 1894 which focuses on new expectations for Victorian women<sup>259</sup>. Thanks to the Industrial Revolution, some of them claim to be more self-sufficient and independent from men in general especially thanks to better opportunities of employment and education. The New Woman represents a balance between both archetypes, in which women could be more independent. This new emancipation disrupts British society and leaves a mark in Gothic Fiction.

*Dracula* is organised through epistolary exchanges and journal entries recollecting Jonathan Harker's journey and the repercussions of his travel on his relatives, especially on his fiancée Mina Murray and her best friend, Lucy Westenra. The multiplicity of narrators enables a succession of various subjective points of view, and especially female perceptions which distinguishes this novel from the others mentioned. *Dracula's* narrative introduces this new archetype of femininity through its main female characters. At first, Lucy is compared to Mina as both represent opposites in the feminine archetypes of the nineteenth century upper-class. Lucy is depicted as more emancipated in comparison to her best friend, by being willingly frivolous and complaining that she cannot marry her three suitors all together<sup>260</sup>. She embodies a subtler version of the Femme Fatale archetype than Matilda, who is clearly defined as a succubus. On the other hand, Mina stands out with her will to develop her writing skills through journalism, which could evoke women as in charge of their own image and destiny. *Dracula's* progression in the choice of his victims may evoke *The Monk's* triangle between Ambrosio, Matilda and Antonia in which *Dracula* replaces the monk.

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259 Buzwell, Greg. "Daughters of Decadence: The New Woman in the Victorian Fin de Siècle". *The British Library*, 15 May 2014. <<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/daughters-of-decadence-the-new-woman-in-the-victorian-fin-de-siecle>>. Accessed 7 July 2019.

260 Stoker, Bram. *Dracula* (1897). Kindle ed., Amazon Classics. 2017.

Numerous critics consider Stoker's work as a misogynistic satire in its portrayal of New Women. For Judith Roth, Stoker's treatment of women is completely patriarchal with a "hostility towards female sexuality<sup>261</sup>". Judith Wasserman interprets it as a fight to regain control over women, however Stephanie Demetrakopoulos portrays Stoker as a feminist because of the structure of the book in two parts, each depicting one of the two feminine archetypes<sup>262</sup>. Bram Stoker, through *Dracula*, would rather show the divergent reactions to the emergence of the New Woman: "Indeed Stoker's treatment of women in *Dracula* does not stem from his hatred of women in general but, [...] from his ambivalent reaction to a topical phenomenon – the New Woman<sup>263</sup>." Mina and Lucy represent two different aspects of the New Woman. According to Miriam Bjørklund<sup>264</sup>, at first, Mina partly embodies the Angel of the House as her manners as an ideal future wife are praised by other male characters. She is a figure of nurture for Lucy during her nocturnal getaways or her recovery from Dracula's bite. Stoker still conveys the traditional imagery of women while depicting the intellectual side of New Women through her character. She works as a school teacher, aspires to write, which makes of her the only focaliser to narrate her life and emotions unlike former Gothic heroines seen through a male point of view.

Charles Prescott and Grace Giorgio<sup>265</sup> argue that Mina would rather represent a modernised version of the Angel of the House influenced by the New Woman figure. Prescott and Giorgio also take her close friendship with Lucy into account to show her evolution after her own transformation into a vampiric form seen as a mutation of the standard feminine model. She represents an example of purity in Jonathan's eyes in complete opposition with the three sisters in the count's castle:

*By making these women's monstrosity contingent to Mina's purity, Harker naturalizes her propriety as the limit of the imaginable. Harker's rather desperate reading of Mina's unquestionable purity largely parallels with Van Helsing's later in the text – without clearly defined, passive femininity against which to define himself in this world, Jonathan Harker crumbles into a nightmare of uncertainty, confusion and vampiric "brain fever"<sup>266</sup>.*

261 Senf, Carol A. "'Dracula': Stoker's Response to the New Woman". *Victorian Studies*. 26.1. (1982): 33–49. p. 33.

262 *Ibid.*

263 Senf, Carol A. "'Dracula': Stoker's Response to the New Woman". *Victorian Studies*, *op. cit.* p. 34.

264 Bjørklund, Miriam. *"To face it like a man": Exploring Male Anxiety in Dracula and the Sherlock Holmes Canon*. Thesis. University of Oslo, 2014. Web. Accessed on 28 June 2019.

265 Prescott, Charles E., and Grace A. Giorgio. "Vampiric Affinities: Mina Harker and the Paradox of Femininity in Bram Stoker's 'Dracula.'" *Victorian Literature and Culture*. 33.2. (2005): 487–515. p. 490. *JSTOR*. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25058725>>. Accessed on 8 August 2019.

266 *Ibid.*

Jonathan characterises Mina as a damsel in distress which still recalls medieval romances. As a result of this interpretation, other women are automatically depicted as monstrous since they are potential threats to his idea of the “perfect woman.”

The experience of vampirism is lived differently by both women which could be analysed as their different embracement of the New Woman values. As an Angel of the House, Mina is expected to remain pure and rather ignorant of sexuality outside of reproductive purposes, which would explain her incomplete transformation. Moreover, Dracula’s visits even suggest sexual abuse, intensified by the nightmarish atmosphere. She is passive in her relationship with Dracula, and forced by him to suck his blood which is interpreted by Bentley as a “symbolic act of enforced fellation<sup>267</sup>”. On the other hand, Lucy slowly dies to be reborn as a blood-thirsty vampire:

*Women vampires are essentially unclean and the right to punish their behaviour is premised on versions of normality, conventional modesty, purity, compliance and subordination. In early female vampire narratives, punishment comes from the forces of order; the rise of men to define them as sick, hysterical, wrong, to be managed, constrained, locked up and destroyed. [...] Psychic draining, enervation and hysteria can be seen as constructed by a period and its problems with women’s sexuality and energies<sup>268</sup>.*

Many analyses have been made about Lucy’s transformation into a vampire. Gina Wisker evokes the idea that female vampire narratives are associated with the ambivalence between conforming to the norm and restraining deviations from the rules. The rise of psychiatry and psychoanalysis in the nineteenth century justifies these “deviations” by mental illnesses such as hysteria seen as a “female disorder<sup>269</sup>”. This illness becomes the perfect excuse for men to justify the absence of any change in the behaviour or any intent of self-determination from their wives, mothers, sisters, etc. Following Wisker’s reasoning, Lucy’s vampirism could have been diagnosed as hysteria leading to her burial and murder by Arthur Holmwood who kills her for good as well as the figure of the New Woman she embodies.

Another demand from the first wave of feminism is the access to birth control associated with the sexual freedom of the New Woman. Here, this demand can be seen in

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267 Bentley, C.F. “The Monster in the Bedroom: Sexual Symbolism in Dracula” *Literature and Psychology*. 22. (1972) 27-34. p. 30.

268 Wisker, Gina. “Female Vampirism”, in Horner, Angela and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Guide. op. cit.* 150-165. p. 156.

269 Mulvey-Roberts, Marie. “The Female Gothic Body”, in Horner, Angela and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Guide. op. cit.* 108-119. p. 110.: “A more common diagnosis for women refusing to conform to the straitjacket of traditional femininity was hysteria, a malady affecting both mind and body, which was often connected to sexuality.”

Lucy's attacks on children after her transformation which leads Joseph Andriano<sup>270</sup> to compare her to the lamia. According to Bentley, as an embodiment of the New Woman, Lucy's vampirism can be seen as a full acknowledgement of her sexuality, in which Dracula's bites would evoke masturbation for example. Lucy is shamelessly wooed by three different suitors which would lead her to a form of polyandry, thus, the blood transfusions in order to save her could represent an orgy<sup>271</sup>. Lucy's murder could be seen as a scene of rape, figuratively represented by the stake while a prayer is being read by Van Helsing "in order to justify the fatal correction of Lucy's dangerous wandering<sup>272</sup>."

### 3. Women as Monsters: *The Lair of the White Worm*, Bram Stoker

Monstrosity becomes more visual and normalised to fit standards as publications are progressively available to a larger audience in the nineteenth century. All definitions of "monster" associate the term with deformity, hybridity, physical or psychological abnormality in a given sociocultural context<sup>273</sup>. Due to their cultural association with evil forces, felines and snakes are often associated with women, as Eve is considered as the first sinner according to the Bible and Milton's *Paradise Lost*<sup>274</sup>, which characterise women as dangerous and untamed by nature. The snake's bite is also a triggering factor of the plot in *The Monk* to depict Ambrosio's surrendering to Matilda's temptation. The first feminist movements and the New Woman may recall this monstrosity as a conflict between different cultural categories<sup>275</sup>.

*The Lair of the White Worm* is one of the last works written and published by Bram Stoker in 1911. The plot is inspired by the legend of the Lambton Worm, featuring a giant white worm terrorising villagers and abducting children, slayed by John Lambton, cursing his family over nine generations<sup>276</sup>. With this source of inspiration, Stoker re-associates his novel with the tradition of the medieval romance while setting a Gothic atmosphere at the same

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270 Andriano, Joseph. *Our Ladies of Darkness: Feminine Daemonology in Male Gothic Fiction*. *op. cit.* p. 107.

271 Bentley, C.F. "The Monster in the Bedroom: Sexual Symbolism in Dracula" *op. cit.* p. 28.

272 Craft, Christopher. "'Kiss Me with Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's Dracula." *Representations*. 8 (1984) 107-133. p. 118. *JSTOR*, <[www.jstor.org/stable/2928560](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928560)>. Accessed 8 Sept. 2019.

273 *Monster Definition and Meaning | Collins English Dictionary*. <<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/monster>> Accessed 27 Sept. 2019.

274 Gilbert, Sandra M., and Gubar, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. 2nd ed., Yale University Press, 2000. p. 196-197.

275 Carroll, Noel. *Philosophy of Horror: or, Paradoxes of the Heart*. Routledge, New York. 1990. p. 43.

276 Atkinson, Phillip. 'The Lambton Worm'. *Folk Tales of North East England*, 2017. pp. 40-45. <[https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/01cc06\\_f59e2c7259124f44897c71a2bacf5b71.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/01cc06_f59e2c7259124f44897c71a2bacf5b71.pdf)>



time. In the book, the intertextuality with the tale goes even further with the evocation of the “Worm of Lambton” by Nathaniel<sup>277</sup>.

This book is usually acknowledged as one of the worst works ever written by Bram Stoker due to a poor underdeveloped plot<sup>278</sup>, probably due to the publication of an abridged edition in 1925, but readers are also struck by the misogyny and the racism of the story. Indeed, the depiction of women is once again in contradiction with female characters according to Victorian standards. Mimi and Lilla Watford generally portrayed as well-behaved young Victorian ladies are compared to Lady Arabella March, an uncanny widow and owner of Diana’s Grove. Lady Arabella has already been married once and uses marriage as a strategy to become more powerful. Moreover, her first union remained unsuccessful therefore she is a childless woman who took the lead of her household by permanently excluding the main figure of authority, as Sir Nathaniel suspects her to have murdered her first husband<sup>279</sup>. We have also mentioned that older women in Gothic Fiction recall the figure of the witch, stereotypically depicted as a solitary and bold old woman:

*If older women especially were the main target of witch-hunts, it is because they expressed an intolerable boldness. They were [answering back] to their neighbours, priests, ministers even to judges and executioners[...] They could do it even more as they were no longer supervised by fathers, husbands or children<sup>280</sup>.*

In this quote, Mona Chollet explains the analogy between witches and older women due to their emancipation from men. They inspire respect and fear at the same time because of their experience of life. The question of ageing women in Gothic fiction is faced by Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik in their article “No Country of Old Women: Gender, Age and the Gothic” in which they explain the Otherness associated with the fear of ageing. Old women in Gothic are usually portrayed as mothers, or as cruel childless women, associated with the witch figure. Examples of monstrous female creatures such as Medusa or the lamia can be associated with Lady Arabella but given the theme of exoticism in the novel, she would relate more to the Caribbean folklore’s soucouyant<sup>281</sup> who transforms at night to attack children, just

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277 Stoker, Bram. *The Lair of the White Worm*, Kindle ed. p. 139.

278 Daniels, Les. *Living in Fear: A History of Horror in the Mass Media*. Scribner, New York. 1975. p. 63.

279 Stoker, Bram. *The Lair of the White Worm*. *op. cit.* p. 62.

280 Chollet, Mona. *Sorcières, la puissance invaincue des femmes*. *op. cit.* p. 156. (our translation): “Si les chasses aux sorcières ont particulièrement visé des femmes âgées, c’est parce que celles-ci manifestaient une assurance intolérable. Face à leurs voisins, aux prêtres ou aux pasteurs et même face aux juges et aux bourreaux, elles répondaient[...] Elles le pouvaient d’autant mieux qu’elles n’étaient plus encadrées par un père, un mari ou des enfants.”

281 “a malignant witch believed to shed her skin by night and suck the blood of their victims”, ‘Soucouyant | Definition of Soucouyant by Lexico’. *Lexico Dictionaries | English*, <<https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/soucouyant>> Accessed 22 Sept. 2019.

like Lady Arabella who is actually a snake<sup>282</sup>. Therefore, the demonisation of this folk figure is linked to “the relative longevity of women in times when life expectancy was much shorter<sup>283</sup>.” Ageing is subjectively felt as otherness because of the unavoidable physical changes and the way they are faced in society<sup>284</sup>. Ageing is counterbalanced with the symbolism of the snake that also evokes revival by sloughing<sup>285</sup>.

Bram Stoker revisits the characteristics of the Femme Fatale to built this dangerous aura. The reader follows Adam’s focalisation, which consequently favours a masculine and patriarchal perception of Lady Arabella as the ultimate threat of the novel as “[she] is of snake nature. She has committed crimes to [their] knowledge. She retains something of the vast strength of her primal being [...] has the eyes of a snake<sup>286</sup>.” Lady Arabella mostly acts as a dangerous woman within the confidentiality of the pit on her estate where her villainy and her snake form come out. She embodies the fear of women taking power over men in the beginning of the twentieth century with the right to vote for women for example. There is also a reversal from older Gothic works in which “[older] decaying buildings and ancient family portraits are outward and visible signs of the oppressive past, older men are more often than not ill-intentioned patriarchal figures [and] older women are for the most part entirely disposable<sup>287</sup>” according to Horner and Zlosnik. Indeed Lady Arabella’s former husband becomes disposable in her thirst for power. This murder can be seen as a rejection of her spouse status<sup>288</sup>. To some extent, Bram Stoker discusses once again the New Woman by presenting her as financially independent: Lady Arabella is the rightful owner of her place and also figuratively more sexually liberated, which is perceived as threatening to the patriarchal system due to her equality with other men.

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282 Stoker, Bram. *The Lair of the White Worm*. *op. cit.* p. 60.

283 Horner, Avril and Zlosnik, Sue. “No Country for Old Women: Gender, Age and the Gothic”, in Horner, Angela and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Guide*. *op. cit.* 184-197. p. 192.

284 Horner, Avril and Zlosnik, Sue. “No Country for Old Women: Gender, Age and the Gothic”, in Horner, Angela and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Guide*. *op. cit.* 184-197. p. 184-185.: “This “Othering” of the self is due partly to the recognition of inevitable physical change and decay in one’s own body and the sense of split subjectivity it can produce, and partly of the acceptance of social attitudes which see the old as irrelevant and an (increasingly heavy) economic burden.”

285 Morel, Christine. *Dictionnaire des croyances, des mythes et des symboles*. Paris: Archipoche. 2009. p. 806.

286 Stoker, Bram. *The Lair of the White Worm*. *op. cit.* p. 141.

287 Horner, Avril and Zlosnik, Sue. “No Country for Old Women: Gender, Age and the Gothic”, in Horner, Angela and Zlosnik, Sue. *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Guide*. *op. cit.* 184-197. p. 185.

288 Stoker, Bram. *The Lair of the White Worm*. *op. cit.* p. 62.

## C) Gothic and Proto-feminism

Proto-feminism could be defined as referring to all works and actions in favour of gender equality before the emergence of the first Feminist Wave at the end of the nineteenth-century. The end of eighteenth-century was a time of new ideas and rebellion against an established order encouraged by the Age of Enlightenment. Firstly, we will study Mary Wollstonecraft's first proto-feminist works. Then, we will try to see Female Gothic as playing a part in the awareness of female condition through a new depiction of gothic heroines. Eventually, given that *The Monk* intends to criticise power and moral decorum and that the Gothic tends to point out malfunctions of society, we will reconsider how this work could be read nowadays by focusing on the social and feminist evolutions of these last two centuries.

### 1. Marie Wollstonecraft's work: *A Vindication for the Rights of Women And Maria, or the Wrongs of Women*

The eighteenth century is characterised by a wind of change connected to a challenge of current forms of government in Europe and around the world. Maurice Lévy stresses the diversity of points of view on the idea of progress associated to revolutionary eras, particularly the end of the feudal era, figuratively represented by Gothic ruins<sup>289</sup>. England is already in a post-revolutionary era, which facilitates social evolutions and the communication of new ideas: "The political Evil is thrown back into the past according to the "Gothic" novelist<sup>290</sup>".

Mary Wollstonecraft writes *A Vindication for the Rights of Men* in 1790 as a direct critic of Edmund Burke whom she considers as "the champion of gothic political and aesthetic orders that oppress women even as they claim to protect them<sup>291</sup>". We saw that the notion of feminism had not emerged yet, Mary Wollstonecraft is then considered as one of the first British pioneer of proto-feminism. In her essay, she establishes chivalry as a vice that makes people feel less powerful, with even less rights than before. Maggie Kilgour links "[the] present plight of women with the idea of a feudalism that masks tyranny under the cover of chivalric protection<sup>292</sup>." The mention of "chivalry" recalls the medieval romance and the damsel in distress saved by a knight, which corresponds precisely to the gothic heroine.

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289 Lévy, Maurice. *Le roman "gothique" anglais 1764-1824. op. cit.* p. 613.

290 *Ibid.* (our translation): "Pour le romancier "gothique", le Mal politique est rejeté dans le passé."

291 Kilgour, Maggie. *The Rise of the Gothic novel. op. cit.* p. 78.

292 Kilgour, Maggie. *The Rise of the Gothic novel. op. cit.* p. 78.

This characterisation becomes one of Wollstonecraft's motives to denounce the perpetual childhood-state of women maintained by society through insufficient and inadequate education for girls.

She mostly develops her ideas in *A Vindication for the Rights of Women* in 1792, “a cornerstone of feminist thought<sup>293</sup>,” and in *Maria or The Wrongs of Woman* posthumously published by William Godwin in 1798. In her essay, she denounces the artificiality of female nature conveyed by sentimental novels and a deficiency of rationality in young women's education. Sentimental novels keep them in a state of innocence, emphasised by the patriarchal conception of the family hierarchy preventing women from existing outside of the private sphere:

*In the Vindication, Wollstonecraft [...] placed the ‘romantic twist of mind, which has been very properly termed sentimental’ alongside the adverse influence of popular delusions as magnetism, electricity and mesmerism; the effects of vanity, fashion, dress and ornament; and the excessive devotion to children and husbands. Novels disseminated metaphysical notions respecting the passion of sensual feeling caused by the happiness of love<sup>294</sup>.*

Traditional novels reflect an incomplete perception of reason and morality, conditioning women into an “overdeveloped hunger for the happiness of love, into indiscriminate sensual feeling and unlicensed sexuality<sup>295</sup>”. Wollstonecraft encourages young women to read more pragmatic works, historic accounts or essays for example. As Gothic fiction has a female audience, mostly, it seems legit to question whether or not this type of fiction contributed to this conditioning of women's status.

Similarly to Gothic authors, Wollstonecraft locates this “old state of mind” into the past. Godwin recollects her non-conformist behaviour for the end of the eighteenth-century and mentions biased criticisms about her novel as “her life, like a scandalous novel, [offers] a political homily that those who professed to belong to the ‘new order’ would end up similarly depraved<sup>296</sup>”. According to Maggie Kilgour, Wollstonecraft attempts to associate Rousseau's perception of the “artist” as an exiled wanderer with her “female solitary [...] punished for rebelling against an unjust patriarchal order<sup>297</sup>”. Patriarchy alienates her but also gives her autonomy and power. *Maria* is often perceived as a novelisation of her essay.

293 Ellis Markmann, *The History of Gothic fiction. op.cit.* p. 75.

294 *Ibid.*

295 *Ibid.*

296 Janes, R. M., “On the Reception of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*. 39.2. (1978) :293-302. p. 302. *JSTOR*, <[www.jstor.org/stable/2708781](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2708781)> Accessed on 10 Oct 2019.

297 Kilgour, Maggie. *The Rise of the Gothic novel. op. cit.* p. 79.

The Gothic aesthetic can be found on different levels. The unfinished form of the manuscript annotated by Godwin, may figuratively evoke ancient ruins representing an outdated and crumbly period and mindset. Wollstonecraft's work can be seen as a collection of testimonies as well as an autobiographical account: "In the invention of the story, this view restrained my fancy; and the history ought rather to be considered, as of women, than of an individual. The sentiments I have embodied<sup>298</sup>".

Such an oppression of women is the result of fiction that conveys the Angel of the House as the ultimate model of femininity in society. Consequently, this portrayal conditions young women in behaving as such if they want to succeed in society and eventually find a husband:

*Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man; and should they be beautiful, every thing else is needless, for, at least, twenty years of their lives<sup>299</sup>.*

Wollstonecraft denounces the patriarchal ideology according to which a woman does not necessarily need education apart from the experience brought by a mother figure. This recalls the relationship between Elvira and Antonia in *The Monk*: she is constantly kept in a state of innocence by her mother, and, consequently, is not able to perceive danger. Her presence in Lewis's novel shows the danger of being kept at home in a state of perpetual childhood<sup>300</sup>. Yet this "ideal of ignorance" is double-edged as it preserves their innocence but also leads to its loss. Moreover, there is also a double-standard in the progression of the characters. If failure is vital for male protagonists' growth, female characters "are to be born immaculate; and act like goddesses of wisdom<sup>301</sup>". This distinction prevents them from evolution, failure is unimaginable and growth becomes impossible for them. The mother-daughter transmission is also central in *Maria* as she wants to share her story with her child in order to prevent her from what she might go through in her life otherwise.

For Wollstonecraft, the Gothic dimension is also shown by the perception of the home as ideal, generated by the artificial nature of women defined by men, preventing them from

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298 Wollstonecraft, Mary. *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman*. Édition du Kindle. p.2.

299 Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (Wisehouse Classics - Original 1792 Edition)*. Wisehouse. Édition du Kindle. Emplacement 368.

300 Kilgour, Maggie. *The Rise of the Gothic novel. op. cit.* p. 76.: "[kept] at home with children, they remain children; they are not innocent but ignorant, as 'in order to preserve their innocence, as ignorance is courteously termed, truth is hidden from them.'"

301 Wollstonecraft, Mary. *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman. op. cit.* p. 2.

seeing the reality of their condition<sup>302</sup>. The home represents a gilded cage from where young women may only escape their status of daughters to become wives, yet, “the home is a torture chamber of horrors, a feudal castle in which, freed from the restraints of society, the man may exercise his will and so rule with absolute despotism<sup>303</sup>.” This torture would be generated by the paradox of a disproportionate freedom within the private domestic sphere in comparison to the public sphere:

*Repressed through domestic imprisonment, denied the true limits and inward authority of reason, [women] are encouraged to indulge their feelings and sensibility. The result of such conditioning is shown in many gothic novels, [...] in which female sensibility is enflamed by domestic repression until it becomes murderous. The separation of women, seen as necessary for bourgeois society, is thus revealed to be socially destructive. For Wollstonecraft, the identification of men with reason and women with feelings turns the sexes into enemies with nothing in common<sup>304</sup>.*

In this quotation, Maggie Kilgour states that the theory of the separate spheres is important in the structure of numerous gothic novels. The repression, even seclusion, of women within the house leads to the first steps towards transgression and emphasises tensions. This conditioning would initiate the gothic antiheroine’s challenge of the patriarchal society. The asylum also represents a “different home” for Maria, where she keeps her childhood-state as one of the patients. The building is old and neglected with small windows, which symbolises a society still following feudal rules and morals. Subversive patients, more likely prisoners, suffer from feelings of isolation and deviation in an “[abode] of horror and mansion of despair [...] endeavouring to recall [Maria’s] scattered thoughts<sup>305</sup>”. Paradoxically, Maria “escapes” from this place through literature, which reinforces the importance of education of women in a patriarchal society as a form of emancipation. Similarly, *The Monk’s* Matilda develops into the most emancipated female character in the novel as she has been

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302 Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. *op. cit.* Emplacement 721.: “It appears to me necessary to dwell on these obvious truths, because females have been insulated, as it were; and, while they have been stripped of the virtues that should clothe humanity, they have been decked with artificial graces that enable them to exercise a short-lived tyranny.”

303 Kilgour, Maggie. *The Rise of the Gothic novel*. *op. cit.* p. 76.

304 Kilgour, Maggie. *The Rise of the Gothic novel*. *op. cit.* p. 78.

305 Wollstonecraft, Mary. *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman*. *op. cit.* p. 3.

educated by her uncle since she was his only heir<sup>306</sup>, and she has “suspicious books<sup>307</sup>” in her cell.

Diane Hoeveler also associates Wollstonecraft’s work with Radcliffe’s novels in the creation of “victim feminism” that she defines as “the contemporary antifeminist notion that women earn their superior social and moral rights in society by positioning themselves as innocent victims of a corrupt tyrant and an oppressive patriarchal society<sup>308</sup>.” Indeed, we could easily adapt Maria’s life to this definition, which appears contradictory with feminism as the notion of empowerment and equality are inexistent. Yet, by the time of publication, we may guess that this form of feminism was necessary for Wollstonecraft in order to create an awareness in her readers.

## 2. The Female Gothic

The Female Gothic is firstly easily defined by Ellen Moers in *Literary Women* in 1976 as the “work that women have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth-century, we have called the Gothic<sup>309</sup>.” Moers includes any Gothic work written by a woman. This phrase appears during the Second Wave of feminism (from the sixties to the eighties) and suggests that ‘Female Gothic’ is a distinct sub-genre of Gothic literature. She distinguishes Ann Radcliffe’s “traveling heroinism” from Mary Shelley’s “birth myth.” The first features a heroine travelling through the story to escape from her predicament, when the second is associated with a man putting himself in a God-like position through the creation of a new living being. We will focus on the “travelling heroinism” as Ann Radcliffe is considered as the most iconic writer of Female Gothic.

Female Gothic is probably the most well known in the collective imagination. Diane Hoeveler discerns several common features in Female Gothic novels such as duality between deification and alienation of women, a complex family circle with twisted relationships between its members, with an emphasis on the premise that “men are intrinsically and

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306 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p. 55.: “my father was chief of the noble house of Villanegas: he died [...] and left me sole heiress [...] I was brought up under the care of an uncle possessed of the most solid judgement and extensive erudition. Under his instructions my understanding acquired more strength and justness than generally falls into the lot of my sex: [...] I not only made a considerable progress in sciences universally studied, but in others revealed but to few, and lying under censure from the blindness of superstition.”

307 Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk. op. cit.* p. 361.

308 Hoeveler, Diane. *Gothic Feminism: the Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës. op. cit.* p. 2.

309 Moers, Ellen. “Female Gothic”, *Literary Women*. London: The Women’s Press, 1976. p. 90.

inherently violent and aggressive, and as such, to be feared by women<sup>310</sup>”. This assumption contributes to the development of the “victim feminism” evoked earlier. The Female Gothic is also built on bourgeois standards and expectations:

*The female gothic genre was understood before 1970 primarily as a psychological fiction exploring the fears and guilt attendant on sexual maturation, but these works can more accurately be read as elided representations of the political, socioeconomic, and historical complexities of women’s lives under a newly codified bourgeois ideology. That is, the female gothic novelistic tradition became a coded system whereby women authors covertly communicated to other women – their largely female reading audience – their ambivalent rejection of and outward complicity with the dominant sexual ideologies of their culture<sup>311</sup>.*

Gothic novels are often seen as coming-of-age stories, yet the Female Gothic is more complex than a simple *sexual maturation* as Diane Hoeveler explains it. This sub-genre also describes the anxieties of being a woman in conservative families which may also contribute to the characterisation of the gothic heroine as a victim. Diana Wallace quotes Margaret Cavendish who wrote in 1662 about the cruelty of men towards women and who mentions that “[they bury them] in their houses or beds; as in a grave; the truth is we live like bats or owls, labour like beasts, and die like worms<sup>312</sup>”. Thus, women are put in a submissive and vulnerable position. Consequently, a woman is *civilly dead*, which also shows the political dimension of Female Gothic which underlines and depicts the malfunction of this system through ghosts and disruptive women.

Critics of the Female Gothic revolve around scholars privileging psychological analyses of the stories over historically aware criticisms. The phrase “Female Gothic” only emerges during the Second-Wave of feminism, when Betty Friedan, in 1963, describes women’s unhappiness as “the problem that has no name<sup>313</sup>”. The “Feminine Mystique” describes a modernized Angel in the House as an “idealized image to which women tried to conform despite their lack of fulfilment<sup>314</sup>.” As a consequence, we may find common features between the Female Gothic and feminism such as the feeling of entrapment, the alienation of women’s body or the anxieties due to society’s expectations (even if separated by two

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310 Hoeveler, Diane. *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*. *op. cit.* p. 53.

311 Diane. *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*. *op. cit.* p. 5.

312 Wallace, Diana “*The Haunting Idea: Female Gothic Metaphors and Feminist Theory*” in Wallace, Diana, and Smith, Andrew. *The Female Gothic: New Directions*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. 2009. 26-41. p. 28.

313 Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. W. W. Norton & Company, New York. 2010. p.57

314 Napikoski, Linda. “The Feminine Mystique: Betty Friedan’s Book “Started It All”.” ThoughtCo. 30 September, 2017. <<http://www.thoughtco.com/friedans-the-feminine-mystique-3528957>> Last accessed on 27 March 2018.



centuries): “rooted in ‘the dreams of women’ [...] the English Gothic novel became ‘along one line of its evolution the novel of feminine radical protest’<sup>315</sup>” according to Margaret Anne Doody, quoted in Julian Fleenor’s *Female Gothic* in 1983.

The Female Gothic, by definition, is opposed to the Male Gothic, defined as “Gothic fiction written by men.” Unlike the Female Gothic, the main plot of Male Gothic fictions focuses on the fall of a male protagonist into transgression, disgrace even madness. Several critics such as Syndy Conger, Deborah Ross or even Ellen Moers consider that Lewis’s and Radcliffe’s literary confrontation echoes the gendering of Gothic authors. Men’s ascendancy over literature is threatened by women’s appropriation of the Gothic<sup>316</sup>. Lewis’ and Radcliffe’s successive publications act as mutual responses that could be displayed in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* with the confrontation between Emily and Montoni. His desire even lust for Emily’s possessions and heritage can be considered as an attempt of male authors to “reclaim” a proportion of Gothic fiction, this attempt will not completely succeed, in the same way as Montoni’s plan fails and Emily eventually emerges victorious.

Even with the success of some male authors, women remain the main novelists of Gothic fiction. This also questions the professionalisation of female authorship. Ellen Moers’ *Literary Women* enabled the acknowledgement of a literary feminine subculture in the nineteenth-century. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar question the place of women writers in the nineteenth-century literary context. They point out Bloom’s model of literary history as mainly male and patriarchal and resulting in a need for the poet to invalidate previous poets’ work in order to exist in literary history<sup>317</sup>. In this context, women are perceived as the feminine muse. They also develop the “anxiety of influence” that cannot simply be adapted to female writing, especially as a woman has to face male precursors before influencing literary history, “[on] the one hand, therefore, the woman writer’s male precursors symbolize authority; on the other hand, despite their authority, they fail to define the ways in which she experiences her own identity of a writer<sup>318</sup>.” The anxiety of influence, therefore, becomes an “anxiety of authorship” for female writers who have to dissociate from

315 Wallace, Diana, and Smith, Andrew. “Introduction: Defining the Female Gothic”, *The Female Gothic: New Directions. op.cit.* 1-12. p.3. Taken from Doody, Margaret A. “Deserts, Ruins and Troubled Waters: Female Dreams in Fiction and the Development of the Gothic Novel”, *Genre* 10 (1977): 529-72. p. 560.

316 Fitzgerald, Lauren, “*Female Gothic and the Institutionalisation of Gothic Studies*”, in Wallace, Diana, and Smith, Andrew. *The Female Gothic: New Directions. op. cit.* 13-25. p. 18.: “[from] this perspective, the earliest male Gothicists undertook to wrest the form from the female hands in which they saw it too firmly grasped’ - what Deborah Ross contends was ‘an attempt to regain some lost ground’ and ‘masculinize, or remasculinize, Gothic fiction’.”

317 Gilbert Sandra M. and Gubar Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. op. cit.* pp. 46-47.

the social image conveyed by male precursors. According to Gilbert and Gubar, in order to initiate this process, the female author “can begin such a struggle only by actively seeking a female precursor who, far from representing a threatening force to be denied or killed, proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal literary authority is possible<sup>319</sup>.” Therefore, a majority of writers and critics legitimately consider Ann Radcliffe as the pioneer of Female Gothic and the example of success of female authorship in a man’s literary world.

Ann Radcliffe is not the first Female Gothic authors, however her predecessors do not write in the specific “Gothic romance genre”. According to Ellen Ledoux, “the Gothic mode transcends traditional genres and extends well beyond the novel<sup>320</sup>.” Mary Darby Robinson, Joanna Baillie or Sophia Lee’s *The Recess* influenced Radcliffe on the psychological impact of locations on her characters. Ann Radcliffe managed to synthesize these influences and shape a model later used as a basis for Gothic romances. Her fame results from the impact of her writings on authors in the nineteenth century.

Radcliffe’s recognition as the main Female Gothic writer may also be linked to her comparison with her male counterparts. George Moir, in the *Treatise on Poetry and Modern Romance* published in 1839, points out that Radcliffe’s success would have been favoured by serendipity as Gothic fiction was trendy at this particular moment. About her legacy, he considers her as a “solitary writer with two exceptions<sup>321</sup>” which are Lewis and Maturin. Her popularity in the Female Gothic subgenre is probably also associated to the political dimension of her works. Her work contributed to the creation of *victim feminism*, which echoes the reality of the majority of her contemporary readers and their anxieties<sup>322</sup>.

### 3. Modern reception of *The Monk*: Is *The Monk* a proto-feminist work?

Reception depends on the definition of the concept of “feminism” and remains very subjective. A consensus between all definitions of feminism can be found in the belief in a

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318 Gilbert Sandra M. and Gubar Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. op. cit.* p. 48.

319 Gilbert Sandra M. and Gubar Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. op. cit.* p. 49.

320 Ledoux, Ellen. ‘Was There Ever a “Female Gothic”?’ , *Palgrave Communications. op. cit.* p. 3.

321 *Ibid.*

322 However, this depiction is not fully accepted since critics such as Thomas Mathias warns against Gothic fiction as it would motivate young female readers into embracing French republican values and therefore spend more time reading fantasy rather than learning household skills, though he acknowledges that Radcliffe guarantees conservatism to a certain extent, as her stories end in line with bourgeois expectations. (Ledoux, Ellen. ‘Was There Ever a “Female Gothic”?’ , *Palgrave Communications. op. cit.* p. 5.)

real equality between genders. Feminism also questions the definition of gender and femininity according to a specific society and period of time. The context of reading is as important as the context of writing, consequently, a work can be perceived differently depending the period of reception.

The reader plays a part as essential and active as the author's in the comprehension and reception of a text, especially from the second half of the twentieth-century with Eco's semiotics of reading and the emergence of the "School of Constance," based on the writings of Hans-Robert Jauss<sup>323</sup> and Wolfgang Iser<sup>324</sup>, that focuses on the study of reception itself and the effect inscribed in a text. The definition usually given of reception is the perception of a work by the audience, thus implying the context of consumption as well. We will try to associate Jauss's reception aesthetics, Eco's "model reader" and eventually, Greenblatt's new historicism theory to study *The Monk* so as to understand how this novel may be perceived nowadays.

The aesthetics of reception and the horizon of expectation are theories developed and democratized by Hans-Robert Jauss in the nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies based on Edmund Husserl's hermeneutics and, indirectly, on Vodicka's Structuralism as well. The horizon of expectation can be defined as the aesthetic gap between the expectations of the addressee of a work, here the reader, and the actual aesthetics found in the object of reception<sup>325</sup>. This gap can be conditioned by the context of reception but also by the text's own intertextuality with other references. Yet, Jauss focuses on the inclusion of the reader within a specific culture at a specific moment in history and literary history rather than simply characterizing the interpretation of a work as the point of view of the addressee. These receptions shape literary history as Vodicka suggests and the different consecrations of a work:

*Vodicka part du même constat que Jauss : pas d'oeuvre sans "concrétisation" dans la perception d'un public. [...] les différentes concrétisations de l'oeuvre résultent d'une tension entre l'oeuvre et ses publics, qui est le principe de l'"évolution littéraire". Les oeuvres nouvelles peuvent modifier l'appréhension du public : la transformation des normes peut susciter quant à elle de nouvelles concrétisations des oeuvres anciennes*<sup>326</sup>.

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323 Jauss, Hans-Robert. *Pour une esthétique de la réception*. Paris: Gallimard. 1978.

324 Iser, Wolfgang. "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach." *New Literary History*. 3.2 (1972): 279–299. *JSTOR*, <www.jstor.org/stable/468316>. Accessed 10 Apr. 2020.

325 Jauss, Hans-Robert. *Pour une esthétique de la réception*. *op. cit.* p. 54.

326 Kalinowski, Isabelle. "Hans-Robert Jauss et l'esthétique de la réception. De "L'histoire de la littérature comme provocation pour la science de la littérature" (1967) à "Expérience esthétique et herméneutique littéraire (1982)"" , *Revue germanique internationale*. 8. (1997): 151-172. p. 157.

For Vodicka and Jauss, a work, only exists in the hands of an audience that is already familiar with established norms and features of a specific genre influenced by its own cultural references. Consequently, the conceptions of a work are as numerous as readers who will see it differently.

According to Eco, a text is incomplete as long as it is not linked to codes or conventions known by potential readers who will do some research if they need more information. Reading becomes a new form of communication between the author and the reader through a text that is shaped with both actors' codes and conventions, "a text is ventured for someone who is able to update it, even if the author does not hope, nor wish, for this someone to actually or empirically exist<sup>327</sup>" as the reader's skills and knowledge necessarily differ from the author's. The "model reader" updates a text thanks to "des conditions de succès<sup>328</sup>" such as choices of language, references or a lexical and stylistic heritage enabling them to fully interpret the text. If we associate this concept with Jauss's reception aesthetics, the collaboration between the "model author" and the "model reader" has an incidence on the horizon of expectations as both parts have different sets of conventions given by each other's knowledge in which common elements can be found. The aesthetic gap may be a condition for the creation of the "model reader" who will update his/her own horizon of expectations but also the author's by his own contribution in the interpretation of the work, nourished by their own experiences and their contemporary preoccupations.

The importance of context and state of mind of both reader and author can be found in New Historicism, which appears in Stephen Greenblatt's *Towards a Poetics of Culture* in 1989<sup>329</sup>. New Historicism consists in a plurality of meanings or truths in history depending on the time of the events' occurrence and the relations of power in this context<sup>330</sup>. This theory states that Historicism is deterministic as it gives a unique point of view over a work when New Historicism encourages to consider the information given by the context to give an interpretation based on the semantics of the author's linguistic background. The emphasis on

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327 Eco, Umberto. "Le Lecteur Modèle.", *Lector in Fabula : Le rôle Du Lecteur Ou La coopération interprétative Dans Les Textes Narratifs*. Paris: Le Livre De Poche. 1989. p. 64. (our translation): "un texte est émis pour quelqu'un capable d'actualiser – même si on n'espère pas (ou ne veut pas) que ce quelqu'un existe concrètement ou empiriquement."

328 Eco, Umberto. "Le Lecteur Modèle.", *Lector in Fabula : Le rôle Du Lecteur Ou La coopération interprétative Dans Les Textes Narratifs*. *op. cit.* p. 77.

329 Greenblatt, Stephen. "Towards a Poetics of Culture" in Veesser, H. Aram. *The New Historicism*. Routledge, New York. 1989. 1-14.

330 Hoover, Dwight W. 'The New Historicism'. *The History Teacher*. 25.3 (1992): 355–66. *JSTOR*, doi:10.2307/494247. p. 356. Accessed on 29 November 2019.

language therefore influences the reader into confronting this point of view with theirs, which recall Jauss's horizon of expectation:

*In other words, language has no clear meanings even for the user; [...] The universe of the text is expanded to include everything, society and the individuals in it not excluded. [...] [The] texts are not self-explanatory; they do not contain their own meaning because language is subversive of meaning. Therefore, the reader must place meaning into the text by deconstructing it, by placing it into context, by reviving the hidden meanings that are not consciously articulated and are taken as given by the author. [...] Even among members of the same audience, there any be variations of meaning. [...] Each is conditioned by experience, expectation, race, class, gender.<sup>331</sup>*

The censorship of *The Monk* led Matthew Gregory Lewis to re-write his story several times because of the transgressive depiction of Church and moral constraint. These theories encourage to consider the context of writing and Lewis's background before considering a modern perception. Lewis came from an upper class family, conventionally educated in Oxford, he traveled and worked on the continent where he discovered German literature and started to write *The Monk*. Consequently, this literary heritage can be found in his own work along with Radcliffe's or Walpole's Gothic inspirations, Maurice Lévy<sup>332</sup> also points out the intertextuality with the Marquis de Sade's *Justine*. According to MacLachan, "The Monk is offered to the reader in a literary context<sup>333</sup>", and, therefore, becomes "a work of literary craft<sup>334</sup>" due to intertextuality with all of these inspirations.

The questioning of feminism in literature may also depend on these contextual problematics. Femininity is associated to the definition of binary gender because the distinction cannot occur without a social and cultural definition of masculinity. A majority of Western countries and civilisations are patriarchies, even now, therefore the characterisation of both genders remains biased by a prism that will favour men by keeping the perception of femininity as synonymous with fragility, kindness and, eventually, weakness and the objectification of women. Some of Lewis's feminine characters barely exist outside of a domestic sphere where female authority substitutes the lack of a patriarchal ascendancy. Lewis may criticise the confinement and obsession of sheltered femininity within the "safety" of the house, by exaggerating some features such as Agnes' extreme gullibility for example. However, the theory of the separate spheres is not fully demonstrated in all the feminine characters of the novel, as the setting of the convent marginalises the Prioress, Agnes and the

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331 Hoover, Dwight W. 'The New Historicism'. *The History Teacher*. 25.3 *op. cit.* p. 357.

332 Lévy, Maurice. *Le roman "gothique" anglais 1764-1824. op. cit.* pp. 350-353.

333 MacLachlan, Christopher, "Introduction", *The Monk. op. cit.* p. xix.

334 *Ibid.*

other nuns from society and its customs. The Angels of the house are also portrayed as victims of passions leading some of them to become Fallen Women, willingly or not, according to both the diegesis's and the author's society.

The sexism depicted in the novel is tackled in the introduction of *The Monk* through the expression of female sexuality. This controversial topic punctuates the plot and causes the supernatural key-moments of the story, such as Ambrosio's temptation by Matilda or the Bleeding Nun's apparition<sup>335</sup>. We can find in both of these episodes the link with Eros/Thanatos tension described by Sigmund Freud as the repressed instinctual needs generated by the Id<sup>336</sup>. Sexuality, notably female sexuality, would stand for a manifestation of the Id, figuratively repressed by society by the darkness of the night and the secrecy of vaults. However, MacLachlan points out that female sexuality may be positively represented because of the power and initiative of women. Even if violence and destruction are important elements in Matilda's character, her sexuality is not as negative as it could be in the context of publication, it is banalised even ignored by the Inquisition to focus on her practice of witchcraft. However, Jacqueline Howard explains that "although the novel offers sympathetic and respectful representations of sexually active women whose lives are being ruined by the corruption and small-mindedness of society, it is difficult to maintain that *The Monk* champions a liberated attitude to women's sexuality<sup>337</sup>." According to Howard, the ideal of femininity represented by Antonia is destined to oblivion. She reluctantly becomes a fallen woman after being poisoned, kidnapped and raped by Ambrosio in the penultimate chapter, therefore she shows no consent, no power nor initiative in her sexuality, which doomed her if she is compared to Agnes and Matilda who are still alive and active characters until the end of the story. Moreover, Lorenzo eventually marries Virginia, a former nun, whose name recalls virginity. Consequently, Lewis' criticism of feminine innocence is probably reinforced by the oblivion of Antonia by society after her presumed death.

Women's depiction in *The Monk* is not as manichean as it would seem. Yet, we can wonder how this novel could be considered as proto-feminist when female characters seem so pejoratively portrayed. Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble*<sup>338</sup>, questions women as the actual

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335 MacLachlan, Christopher, "Introduction", *The Monk*. op. cit. p. xv.: "But it is in the second plot that the most graphic image of sex joined with death appears, when Raymond embraces the Bleeding Nun, claiming her as his, as she in turn will claim him."

336 Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. The International Psycho-Analytical Press, London. 1922.

337 Howard, Jacqueline. *Reading Gothic Fiction: A Bakhtinian Approach*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1994. p. 203.

338 Butler, Judith P. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, London. 1999.

subject of feminism. She points out the importance of language and culture in the representation of woman: “it becomes impossible to separate out a gender from its political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained<sup>339</sup>” as distinctions of gender will depend on whether the politics are based on a social model of patriarchy and sexism:

*The political assumption that there must be a universal basis for feminism, one which must be found in an identity assumed to exist cross-culturally, often accompanies the notion that the oppression of women has some singular form discernible in the universal or hegemonic structure of patriarchy or masculine domination. The notion of universal patriarchy has been widely criticized in recent years for its failure to account for the workings of gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts in which it exists<sup>340</sup>.*

A universal definition of feminism would firstly require a universal idea of women oppression in patriarchies, which recalls the theory of aesthetics and New Historicism as these theories are dependent on the context of reception of a work. The relativism suggested by this theory presupposes that women oppression should be similar in both contexts to make an impartial comparison. If *The Monk* is to be confronted through a modern feminist point of view, its social and cultural context has to be taken into account first. Feminist movements over history enabled a progressive emancipation of women in society and literature. Lewis is probably not the most feminist author of his time, as his quotation used in the introduction of Hoeveler’s *Gothic Feminism* may suggest: “I hold that a Woman has no business to be a public character, and that in the proportion that She acquires notoriety, She loses delicacy: I always consider a female Author as a sort of half-Man<sup>341</sup>.” Yet he manages to remain rather equitable in his characters’ morality whether men or women. None of them are entirely flawless, they come close to transgression, willingly or not. The author criticises the power of social, moral and religious constraints in accordance with Butler’s questioning of the real target of feminism.

At the end of the eighteenth century then in the nineteenth century, proto-feminist works are written to awaken collective consciousness over feminine condition. The appropriation of Gothic literature by female authors contributed to reinforce the criticism of bourgeois society

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339 Butler, Judith P. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, London. 1999. pp. 4-5.

340 *Ibid.*

341 Quotation from Lewis, Matthew Gregory. Taken from Hoeveler, Diane. *Gothic Feminism, the Professionalization of Gender From Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*. *op. cit.* p. 1.

through the use of supernatural and uncanny elements to figuratively symbolise women's social struggles.

We can acknowledge that women in *The Monk* are depicted as either villainesses, dreadful ghosts or naive maidens who eventually pay for being unconventional, which would relate this characterisation to a form of misogyny. Moreover, the depiction of disruptive women becomes more visual as the access to literacy and literature becomes easier to all social classes in the nineteenth century. Mary Wollstonecraft, through her writings, virulently criticised female condition in eighteenth-century society, one shaped by centuries of debasement of women as fragile and powerless creatures in need of protection. She also highlights the poverty of women's education as playing a part in this conditioning. Female Gothic writers emancipated themselves through the process of writing and left an indelible mark in Gothic literature by shaping the structure of the genre as it is popularized today. If feminism is to be comprehended as the belief in an equality between genders, their transgressions led to their own falls, regardless of their gender, therefore the development of the characters could be seen as punishment for their actions. In comparison, women may actually be portrayed as more powerful than Ambrosio, through their actual powers and the fear they may create around them. Moreover, it is important to remember that *The Monk* has been written by a man in the late eighteenth century and is consequently biased by this social state of mind. Its proto-feminism cannot be fully proven, nor its Anti-feminism, as *The Monk* is a creation from a different era, therefore it will also depend on the context of reading and the readers' own definition of feminism.



## Conclusion

In this dissertation, we discussed the hypothesis of *The Monk* challenging the stereotypical image of women in Gothic Literature. The first images of female characters are shaped by medieval romances and middle-class social expectations that encourage the vulnerability of women, who are ensnared in the ideal of the Angel of the Hearth. Before *The Monk*, the Gothic heroine is a young and clever lady, often an orphan, who finds herself entrapped by society, represented by a remote and dilapidated castle in which she is threatened by a masculine villain. The other feminine archetypes developed in parallel are more subversive, independent but also driven by their emotions and impulses. This evolution is also due to the influence of the Enlightenment, with the challenge of clerical institutions and the emergence of the novel.

We analysed these characters by associating them with the representation of women in context in order to better comprehend such portrayals in fiction. Women are seen through two main perspectives, either as the Angel of the House, or the Fallen Woman. In *The Monk*, Antonia and Matilda embody these opposites. Antonia is cut off from the rest of the world to keep her pure and innocent, and she is opposed to Matilda who transgresses and advocates a freedom of actions and promiscuous attitude towards Ambrosio.

The figure of the nun is also important as it is an intermediate position in the novel. The nun is outside of the private sphere but has to remain a flawless example of virtue. Agnes and the Bleeding Nun are depicted through a spectrum of libertine literature which reinforces the anti-clericalism and the depiction of women as temptresses. Lewis also enables the deconstruction of these feminine archetypes by the confrontation between conformism and transgression especially in the religious context of the novel. The nun is also in an intermediate position in this opposition as her conformism to religious rules may lead her to transgression of morals as it is the case with the Prioress. The empowerment of women is also depicted through the ghost of Bleeding Nun as she embodies the threat and fear of femininity.

Male characters are not as much developed as female characters and remain similar to the archetypes they embody through the influence of medieval romances. Lorenzo and Raymond are also restrained by their social background and expectations. Ambrosio, the abbot, stands out as the main protagonist of the story but his social expectations differ because of the seclusion of the monastery. It is more complex to categorise this character in a proper

masculine archetype as he stands for a villain figure and an anti-hero figure. To counterbalance, several matriarchies are established by powerful women such as Elvira or the Baroness of Lindenberg who do not completely rely on a masculine figure, which remains non-conformist for the time.

Most of all, Matilda also questions the archetype of the Gothic female protagonist. She represents the most emancipated character because of her masculine/feminine hybridity, her transgressive behaviour and her independence from the moral conduct expected of a woman in the eighteenth-century. We also considered the figure of the witch representing female emancipation, perceived as immoral and as a public indecency in a religious context. Matilda also embodies the *Femme Fatale* who eventually becomes the main authority in the convent through her grip over Ambrosio. Therefore, we pondered the possibility of Matilda becoming “The Monk” whom the title of the book is referring to, as she is introduced as a novice monk at the beginning. The title would present her as the key character even if she is not considered as the main protagonist.

*The Monk* left an important legacy in Gothic literature due to the scandal of its publication. The development of literacy and literature along the nineteenth-century has also contributed to the evolution towards a more available literature to most people. The female characters are simplified and their monstrosity is amplified especially as the first feminist movements start claiming for gender equality. After *The Monk*, the Gothic heroine is more easily transgressive and does not necessarily fit the strict standards of middle-class society. The emergence of the New Woman reinforces the threat represented by women who departed from the social rules.

Eventually, we intended to question *The Monk*'s potential proto-feminism. The book has to be situated in the specific context of publication in comparison to the context of its reception. Consequently, the concept of feminism would rely on a modern definition of a gender equality. At the end of the eighteenth century, Mary Wollstonescraft's work along with the *Female Gothic* points out the entrapment of women in society and female authorship, especially with the example of Ann Radcliffe, represents a form of emancipation. Nevertheless, they still had the necessity to prove their worth as authors as the role of women in literature and poetry is often limited to, that of the muse.

The categorisation of *The Monk* as purely anti-feminist can be anachronic. As we demonstrated it with different theories of reception, the contexts of writing and reception are

essential. Even if a proto-feminist philosophy emerges in the eighteenth century and before, the feminist movements were not properly established before the nineteenth century. The novel was written by Matthew Gregory Lewis, a young man from the upper-class, influenced by *Sturm and Drang* literature and the revolutionary state of mind on the continent at the time of writing, in a society in which women were considered as inferior than men, with no proper civil existence and easily labeled as “temptresses”, “witches” or “lost causes” if they did not conform to the standards of society. The questioning of feminism in a work is recent. *The Monk* might have been written in a misogynistic context according to modern standards, however men and women in the novel are treated equally. The characters’s transgressions are all punished with no specific distinction of gender and women’s sexuality is banalised, even ignored by the figures of patriarchal authority of the novel. Consequently, the categorisation of *The Monk* as proto-feminist is complex and will depend on the reception context since Lewis is not considered as a feminist writer. However, we can highlight the fact that his work was destined to disconcert Lewis’s contemporaries and the important representation of female characters in situation of power in the patriarchal system in his novel emphasises his criticism of England and, indirectly, of the female condition in the eighteenth century.



## Appendix 2: Summary of *The Monk*

*The Monk, A Romance* is a combination of two plots in one story with meetings between common characters or events separated in three volumes. The main plot alternates with the subplot. The first volume starts in eighteenth-century Madrid, at the convent of St Clare where Don Lorenzo and Don Christoval meet Antonia and Leonella, her aunt and chaperon. Don Lorenzo is directly under Antonia's spell. All Madrid is gathered to hear a sermon from Ambrosio, the Abbot of the monastery, who is famous and admired for his flawless morals and his homilies. Antonia has just arrived from Murcia with her mother to solicit the Marquis de las Cisternas for a pension. At the end of the sermon, Lorenzo recognises his sister Agnes, among a group of nuns, who took the veil after a promise made by their mother even before Agnes was born. He learns from Raymond, the Marquis de las Cisternas, that she was his lover before she became a nun. Later, Ambrosio receives Agnes for confession, where she confesses that she plots leaving the convent with a young man and he decides to report her to the Prioress, to punish her despite Agnes's pregnancy. She threatens Ambrosio that he will succumb to temptation at some point. Later on, Rosario, a novice monk, reveals that he is actually Matilda, a woman infatuated with Ambrosio. He sees her as a temptress but finally lets her stay in the monastery. On the day after, he is bitten by a snake in the garden and is considered as terminally ill. In his cell, Ambrosio miraculously and slowly recovers from the poisonous bite but Matilda feels unwell too and explains him that she actually drew out the poison from Ambrosio's wound. He eventually succumbs to temptation and breaks his vows of chastity with Matilda. The subplot that follows focuses on Lorenzo and Raymond de Las Cisternas. The latter tells the story of how he met Agnes on a journey from Salanmanca to Strasbourg. There, under the name of Alphonso d'Alvarada, he meets the Baroness of Lindenberg who invites him to stay at Lindenberg's castle for some times.

The second volume opens on Raymond's tale on his stay at Lindenberg's castle where he met Agnes, who talked to him about the Bleeding Nun, a ghost that has been haunting the castle of Lindenberg on every fifth of May every five years for a century. Together, they plotted to elope on the fifth of May with Agnes dressed as the Bleeding Nun to not arouse suspicion among the other inhabitants of the castle. They eventually eloped but Raymond's lover turns out to be the ghost following him. He met the Great Mogul, who exorcised him and told him the real story of the Bleeding Nun. When Agnes became a nun in Madrid, Raymond tried

to free her from her fate but arrived too late. At the end of Raymond's account, Lorenzo promises him to help both of them to marry. Elvira Dalfa, Antonia's mother, reluctantly agrees Lorenzo's courtship of her daughter but is still concerned about Antonia's lost of patrimony if she marries him. Lorenzo prepares the elopement of his sister, but he is stopped by the other nuns who tell him about Agnes' death. On the other side, Ambrosio blames Matilda for tempting him into such deeds, he fears the Inquisition and for his reputation as a virtuous monk. He discovers Matilda's wickedness but goes on with their relationship nonetheless. Antonia requests him as Elvira's confessor, Ambrosio grows infatuated with her and tries to confess his feelings to Antonia despite Elvira's interdiction. He then attempts to rape her but is interrupted just in time by Elvira, who sends him off. Back to his cell, Matilda intrudes his cell to offers Ambrosio her help to get Antonia for himself. Ambrosio reluctantly accepts in exchange for a talisman of myrtle to keep Antonia in a state of deep slumber.

The third volume reduces more and more the distance between the two plots. Raymond's servant trickes the nuns and understands that Agnes is still alive but locked away. Lorenzo plots an attack against the Prioress with his uncle to avenge his sister. Back to Ambrosio, he creeps towards Antonia's room, thanks to the myrtle, but is stopped again by Elvira, whom he suffocates. He still refuses Matilda's pact. In the morning, Antonia is visited by Elvira's ghost announcing their reunion in three days. Ambrosio comes back to the Dalfa's household and gives Antonia a powerful sleeping beverage, provided by Matilda. During the night, Antonia falls dead in her bed because of the potion. Ambrosio suggests burying her as soon as possible. During the festival of St-Clare, Lorenzo and his group take the prioress aside from the procession and beat her to death. He eventually finds his sister and her stillborn baby. Ambrosio takes the advantage of the festival of St-Clare to join Antonia in the vault and rapes her when she regains consciousness. Matilda deadly wounds Antonia with a poinard. Antonia dies in Lorenzo's arms. The Inquisition eventually arrests Ambrosio and Matilda. A bull from the Pope releases Agnes from her religious commitment and she marries Raymond. Lorenzo marries another former nun. The final chapter focuses on Ambrosio, now a prisoner of the Inquisition waiting for his judgement, he is sentenced to be burnt alive on an auto-da-fé. As he considers all his past actions, he eventually accepts to conclude a pact with Lucifer who gets him free then kills him after listing all his sins. The book ends on Ambrosio left for dead by Lucifer.

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