

Matthew G Lewis: Materialism and *The Monk*

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Abstract

In 1796, Matthew G. Lewis capitalised on the turmoil of late eighteenth-century revolutionary violence, and upheaval, to unleash his scandalous novel *The Monk*. While the supernatural Gothic may appear to characterise his work, there are distinct materialist attributes that permeate his narrative undermining his gothic schema. This essay seeks to explore Lewis' gothic materialism and how he uses it to challenge dominant dualist ontology, whilst also demonstrating that dogmatic philosophical or religious positioning is ill equipped to deal with the realities of human experience.

Matthew G Lewis: Materialism and *The Monk*

Erupting upon literary sensibilities in the 1790s, the eighteenth-century Gothic was a reaction to enlightened rationalism and the Enlightenment's tendency to present experience as purely explanatory. The Enlightenment's foregrounding of reason over superstition as opposed to the Gothic's focus on the irrational and supernatural, intimates that the Gothic can be viewed as a distinctly anti-Enlightenment mode of critique. Certainly, this inclination is implicit in Matthew Lewis's scandalous novel *The Monk* [1796]. Critic Andrew Smith (2007) suggests that the Gothic's explicit concentration on evil behaviour and deeds, and the demonising of individuals who perpetuate such acts, was a profound retort against the horror and violence witnessed in the Terror of revolutionary France.¹ He argues that this focus counters the legacy of enthusiasm for social, political, and religious reform championed by Enlightenment thinkers and advocates.² Gothic scholar Fred Botting (2001) observes, it is the very rise of enlightenment reason and its associated tenets, empiricism, scientism and objectivity, that necessitated an oppositional reaction. Thus, superstition, the supernatural, sublime natural force, darkness, and violent passions - where human fear and uncertainty materialise through transgressive taboos and prohibited behaviours, became intrinsic to the Gothic genre.³

Hence, the principal focus of the gothic was to express anxieties about the status quo. By utilising an extreme oppositional stance to the hegemonic currency of Enlightenment ideas, the gothic exposed the inherent difficulties generated by Enlightenment thought. Matthew Lewis in *The Monk*

employs this eighteenth-century gothic schema; the supernatural, unreason, desire and taboo are essential devices in his critique of a so-called Enlightened Europe. However, there are also instances where Lewis deconstructs this schema. At times, during the narrative, he utilises contradictory juxtaposition which draws attention to the logical extremes of Enlightenment materialism. In doing so he emphasises an absolute freedom of human action through which all moral order collapses. Indeed, during the eighteenth century, materialism was beginning to take a disquieting hold in philosophical quarters. Thus paradoxically, gothic horror in *The Monk* can be seen as a testimonial for an anti-dualist, monist materialism, but also synonymously as a distinct warning of the consequences that such positioning elicits. It is this conceptualisation of Lewis's gothic materialism that will be explored later in this essay.

The freedoms afforded by Lewis' literary imaginings reveal freedom in its absolute, nihilistic form, where constraints of moral and social rectitude become nullified. Echoing John Cleland, who was responsible for the equally scandalous novella *Fanny Hill* [1748], Lewis appropriates the tendencies of contemporary French philosophic and politicised pornographic materialist discourse. Lewis goes further than Cleland, however, and posits a deliberate juxtapositional and oppositional stance by situating Catholicism and the clergy within a distinctly anti-dualist materialist framework. Romanticism scholar Clara Tuite (1997) suggests that the monastic setting of *The Monk* positions the narrative within a libertine 'pornotopic' context; a space where enlightenment is characterised by sexual freedom, and realised within a wholly materialist framework.⁴ While this observation bears out under scrutiny, the implicit anti-dualist critique that this materialist positioning engenders is neglected within Tuite's exposition. The diametric antagonism of religion and philosophic posturing within Lewis's narrative exposes the problematics at the core of Enlightenment reasoning, and the consequences for its tendency toward moral universalism. This essay will illustrate how Lewis undermines his own gothic narrative through employing a lexical materialism, as well as destabilising the Enlightenment standard code of moral virtue championed by philosophes who focused on a fixed conception of human nature; one naturally sociable, infinitely perfectible, and determined by man's natural reasoning capabilities.

Matthew G. Lewis – The Man

Not neglected, but criticised beyond all conscience; thus are the sentiments of Matthew G. Lewis writing in a prefatory footnote to the fourth edition, four years after *The Monk* (March 1796), was first published.⁵ Indeed, the scathing critical response by the likes of Coleridge and the public outcry against Lewis' blasphemous, violent and lascivious gothic literary endeavour, ensured certain

infamy for the author who, when first publishing the novel at the age of nineteen, perhaps did not quite realise the impact such a visceral portrayal of lust, vice, sex, incest and murder would have on the sensibilities of late eighteenth-century polite society. It is telling that one staunch advocate of Lewis' novel was the Marquis de Sade. The similarities between Lewis' doomed heroine Antonia and Justine, de Sade's abject victim, are too pronounced to be readily dismissed. In Paris 1791, the second edition of *Justine, or Good Conduct Well Chastised (Justine, ou les Malheurs de la vertu)* was published. During the summer months of the same year Lewis himself was visiting Paris on a summer break from his studies. One can surmise that Lewis was potentially exposed to, read, and was influenced by de Sade's scandalous work.⁶

In real life, Lewis himself was no stranger to scandal, or at least scandal that was perpetrated by his parents - his mother more specifically. Matthew Lewis senior met and married Frances Maria Sewell (daughter to Sir Thomas Sewell, Master of the Rolls) and they had four children; Matthew Gregory (the eldest), was born in 1775. Lewis senior was a serious, stern, inflexible and well to do political personage. Chief Clerk in the War Office, as well as Deputy-Secretary of War he seemed quite the opposite to Frances Maria who had wowed suitors with her musical and dancing prowess before marrying Matthew senior at a young age. With a penchant for the frivolous society of literati, thespians, and musicians, Frances Maria introduced her son, whom she was very close to, into such circles, and he himself developed a love of theatre and literature.⁷ At the age of six Lewis attended Westminster School; it was at this time his parents separated. Frances Maria, prone to indiscretion, finally left her husband to embark upon an affair with a music master called Harrison, and spent much of Lewis' early childhood changing addresses so that her husband could not locate her. Although Frances Maria received a substantial allowance from her estranged husband, her extravagance meant she was often in need of money. Much of Lewis junior's initial literary endeavours were written with earning potential in mind so that he could help support his mother. His soiree in Paris in 1791, saw an escalation in his literary output and, at the mere age of fourteen, he completed first farce *The Epistolary Intrigue*⁸

By 1792, Lewis was immersing himself in his writing. His comedy, *The East Indian* was finished (although not performed at Drury lane until some seven years later). He also penned the satire *Village Virtues*. Satire and comedy were not Lewis' literary strengths. A visit to Germany introduced him to the *Sturm and Drang* literary movement. He met the eponymous Goethe, and lodged in haunted quarters (he would awake to the rustling of papers in empty adjoining apartment). Such influences may explain his shift toward the Gothic. Its focus on the contrary aspects of supernatural horror, and naturalistic sublime sensibility, seemed a style more suited to Lewis. In Weimar, Lewis became acquainted with German high society; it was Lewis senior's

intention to ensure that his son learned the language with a view to becoming a diplomat after completing his studies. However, these excursions did more to provoke Lewis' literary imaginings, and ambitions toward a literary career, rather than a diplomatic one.⁹

This became evident when, after he finished his degree at Oxford, his father secured Lewis a position as a diplomat at The Hague, a place and a people that Lewis found interminably boring. Indeed, by the end of Lewis' sojourn in December 1794, *The Monk* had been written.¹⁰ However, it was not until March 1796 that the novel was published anonymously. Initially it was well received, avoiding critical censure. As critic Lauren Fitzgerald (2003) notes Lewis, by the time of publication, had been appointed a member of parliament. It was only when he put his name and occupation to the novel, that a public outcry ensued.¹¹ Coleridge in *The Critical Review* (1797) was comprehensively scathing about the novel and what he considered its lack of "moral truth" and "libidinous minuteness", whilst excoriating Lewis, at whom we should "stare and tremble" given his role of "Legislator!". Indeed, how could an arbiter of religious and moral standards, such as a member of parliament, produce, let alone publish, a work of such moral disapprobation?¹² Thomas James Mathias' in *The Pursuits of Literature* (July, 1797), censured *The Monk* as being a work of pornography akin to John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* (1748), and stated the explicit blasphemy in the narrative should see Lewis hauled before a court of law to face indictment.¹³ Fitzgerald observes that Lewis the man, began to be viewed interchangeably with his terrible creation the monk Ambrosio. As an individual who had assumed a position of authority, Lewis, like Ambrosio, had inadvertently unmasked himself, (although not via an orgy of lust, incest and murder), through owning his own publication.¹⁴

While the critics may have viewed *The Monk* censoriously, the public voraciously consumed the novel. So decisively did they want to test their moral virtue that by 1800 *The Monk* was on its fifth edition. By the fourth edition, however, Lewis had capitulated to the scathing reviews and moral uproar. Adhering to Mathias' advice he edited the novel and omitted the blasphemous, offensive and lusty passages that had caused such consternation.¹⁵ Although Lewis may have abandoned his original narrative, the remainder of this chapter will focus on the full and unabridged edition, leaving supposedly scurrilous material intact for consideration and analysis. Firstly, before moving on to the analysis of *The Monk*, insight into the contemporary eighteenth-century philosophical accents that permeate the text, particularly that of materialism, is required. Understanding this materialist context will help illustrate how elements of the gothic supernatural are undermined, and lexically deconstructed, by Lewis.

Materialism in the Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment.

As already mentioned, Lewis' *The Monk* was considered by Malthus analogously with John Cleland's *Fanny Hill: Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749). However, when reading Cleland alongside Lewis, Malthus was overstating the issue somewhat. Lewis' novel is considerably less prurient than Cleland's graphic descriptions of Fanny's sexual exploits, education, and socialisation as a fledgling woman of the night. Nevertheless, lexical equivalences are apparent. In both texts, language becomes a conduit for a materialist ontology. Materialism as a philosophical movement had re-emerged during the European Renaissance within the philosophy of Rene Descartes [1596-1650], Baruch Spinoza [1632-1677] and Thomas Hobbes [1588-1679]. Each philosopher forwarded a slightly different form of materialist thought, but each deliberation resulted in similar conundrums for faith-based belief and religion – echoes which reverberated throughout eighteenth-century thinking. Indeed, burgeoning materialism and the Enlightenment were consorts. The major precepts of the Enlightenment project were progress and perfectibility and were achieved through reason and empirical based learning, and importantly, the rejection of superstition. Life, and existence itself, were positioned firmly in the territory of objective reality. When we consider the fundamental tenets of materialism, then the parallels between the wider Enlightenment, and materialist ontology, becomes apparent.

Philosophical Materialism, initially conceived in the Ancient Greek writings of Democritus, and subsequently refined by Epicurus, can be described through its insistence on a substance-based metaphysics, discoverable through an empirical epistemological process. Expanding on Democritus' theory of atoms, Epicurus maintained that all life in the observable universe consists of indivisible atoms which, when moving through the void, combine to constitute the differing forms that life and matter take. Contrary to Plato's teachings, he contends that there are no immutable forms or an immaterial soul, and if the Gods are in existence then they have no dealings with material life forms. Indeed, notions of an afterlife, are fallacious. Just as atoms come together to create matter in all its forms, when matter ceases to exist in its current vital form, the atoms dissipate into the void, and transmutationally reform to create new instances of matter. Such circumscribed mechanical processes suggest a rigid fixity in human nature, and more importantly, a determinism, where humans cannot act in any way beyond what their physical constitution suggests.¹⁶

Although Epicureanism dissipated due to Aristotle's rejection of atomism it reemerged as a basis for new Renaissance scientific theories, and was adopted by individuals such Galileo Galilei, Pierre Gassendi, as well as informing corpuscular theory advanced by scientific thinkers such as Renee Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, Robert Boyle, and Isaac Newton. Indeed, the seeds of eighteenth-century monist materialism were paradoxically found in Descartes' mind-body dualism. In

Meditations: Meditations in First Philosophy in which are demonstrated the existence of God and the distinction between the human soul and the body (1641), starting from a position of doubt, and using the application of practical reasoning, Descartes asserts the irrefutable truth that he knows that he exists i.e. he has a mind; however, he also knows that he is dependent on his corporeal, material, extended body and his senses for his existence. These cogitations lead him to predicate that the mind and body are two separate substances.¹⁷ As critic John Heil (2004) observes, the difficulty of Descartes' dualism was evident to his contemporaries. Descartes creates an absolute demarcation in separating the mind/soul and body into two distinct substances.¹⁸ The aporia of how causal interaction is possible between the extended material corporeal body (*res extensia*) and the non-extended, non-material, incorporeal mind (*res cogitans*) is unsuccessfully rationalized by Descartes, instead he invokes divine interference as the mitigating agent in the exceptional fusion of the incommensurable substances of soul and body. For materialists, such a position could not be verified rationally or empirically. Thus, much of materialist thought in the eighteenth century, is an anti-dualist rejection of soul, in favour of one substance, the body.

Epicurean materialism found its eventual resting place in the controversial writings of Julien Offray de la Mettrie who, in 1747, published his philosophical treatise *L'Homme Machine* (Machine Man). La Mettrie rejected any notion of a supernatural, immaterial soul directly contravening Descartes' dual substance theory, i.e. how can the incorporeal soul be considered a substance in and of itself? In expanding on Descartes' assertion that animals are fleshy automations without souls, La Mettrie applied this thinking to human beings stating their physical constitution is entirely mechanical. He argued that even the workings of the mind and conscience can be attributable to mechanistic principles, and involve the nervous system becoming inflamed through sensory stimulation. While Epicurus had preserved a semblance of theism, La Mettrie presents the probability of there being a supreme being, only to satirically undermine this probability through Pyrrhonic subterfuge and a Spinozist insistence on Nature as the only authentic religion that humans should accredit.¹⁹

In *Fanny Hill, Memoirs of a Lady of Pleasure* [1748] which was published a year after La Mettrie's *L'Homme Machine*, mechanistic and naturalistic materialism is palpable and illustrated through graphic narratorial representation of the physical body, and the sexual act. Fanny's desire, sexuality, and pleasure and pain are explicitly and seductively described through a lexical framework that magnifies materialism; indeed, such writings were considered dangerous to the readership. Although written almost fifty years after Fanny Hill, Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* provoked a furor akin to Cleland's. Obscene libel became legally defined in 1727; subsequently obscene writings were described as corrupting to the populace's morals and manners, and therefore required suppression

and prosecution.²⁰ As scholar Michael Gamer (2000) observes, the law had little to do with actual content, subject matter or generic convention, more the writing's perceived undesirable effects on society and readers.²¹ While initially focused on pornographic literary outputs such as Cleland's *Memoirs*, this legal sanction, by the end of the eighteenth century, became applicable to the Gothic horror genre. Thus Lewis, and later Dacre, and Maturin were subject to investigation and censure by clerics, reviewers, and literati alike, who continually compared these outputs with Cleland's controversial novella.²²

It is important to note that these legal strictures concentrated on the potential reader response, rather than the material itself, and anticipated incendiary, subversive possibilities that literary works could achieve through radical discourse. The disruptive capacity of Lewis's writing was, as Dale Townshend (2005) illustrates, recognised by Coleridge who protested that for readers, *The Monk* incorporated a range of "powerful stimulants" and "meretricious attractions".²³ Coleridge identified a significant sensual and emotional register within the text, thus highlighting the dangerous potentiality for moral (and social?) corruption that Lewis' novel could precipitate.

Gothic Materialism and *The Monk*

Like Cleland before him, Lewis adopts the conventions of genre, and infuses his narrative with philosophical underpinnings. Aligning himself with standard gothic tropes and suggestive implicit pornographic tableaux, Lewis advances a materialist ontology which brutally depicts the logical extension that such positioning affords. Lewis situates the monk Ambrosio as a metaphorical locus for this antagonism which is revealed in the conflict between his physical and psychological manoeuvrings. The tortuous interiority of Ambrosio's reflections manifests in a brutal exteriority of destructive behavioural tendencies, and illustrates the fundamental crisis of freedom that exists within the boundaries of material reality and moral agency. Ambrosio's descent into murderous madness, while framed within a supernatural Gothic schema, is illustrative of the diagnostic discourses that emerged within medical literature of eighteenth-century Britain and Europe. These were at odds with the demonological explanations for man (and woman's) propensity for derangement and delusion that had dominated within preceding Medieval and Early Modern thinking.²⁴ Roy Porter (2004) observes how Hobbes in *Leviathan*, arguably Britain's first vocal proponent of a materialist philosophical worldview, exposes the irrational fanatical expostulations of the religiously devout, who base their suppositions concerning madness on preternatural determinations. Hobbes, along with

men of medicine, began to draw correlations between religious manifestations and hallucinations, convulsions, violence and seizures as experienced by lunatics.²⁵

The pathologizing and rationalisation of mental illness as concomitant with neurological dysfunction increased as the eighteenth century progressed. Enlightened scientific inquiry, fundamental to the materialist's position, informed diagnoses of mental disorders. Thus, mental illness and madness were explained in explicitly material terms. The Cartesian distinction between mind and body was eroded through recourse to empirical scientific observation of both the physiological, and behavioural effects, of disorders of the mind on the human subject. Nicholas Robinson in *A New System of the Spleen, Vapours and Hypochondriack Melancholy, Wherein all the decays of the Nerves, and Lownesses of the Spirits are Mechanically Accounted for* (1729), contends that madness and delusion are not attributable to metaphysical fancy, arising from inflamed imagination, but are entirely bodily in their inception. Indeed madness or 'lunacy' occurs when, 'the Patient appears with a fierce, grim and rough Aspect, his Reason is disturb'd , his Judgement confus'd, and the Exercise of his Intellectuals is lost and bewilder'd in a bottomless Gulph of most absurd cogitations'.²⁶ Although Robinson is drawing on pre-Enlightenment humoral theories (which are subsequently replaced by theories about the nervous system as the eighteenth century progresses), the inseparable connection between mind and body is apparent. Indeed, William Battie, writing in 1758, observes that dysfunction within the mind can be ascribed to both internal and external factors, each material in origin. Thus, in his *Treatise on Madness* he identifies two forms of madness, 'original', and 'consequential madness'. 'Original' madness or delusion occurs when the sensory internal function of the nerves and fibres in the brain are disturbed; whereas, 'consequential madness' is induced through external 'pressure' which causes malfunction within the sensory fibres.²⁷

Thomas Arnold's insight into conditions of insanity are most pertinent when considering representations of madness within *The Monk*. In *Observations on the Nature, Kinds, Causes, and Prevention of Insanity* (1782-86), Arnold determines that, '[s]ome of the most powerful causes of . . . Insanity are—religion—love—commerce, and the various passions which attend the desire, pursuit and acquisition of riches—every species of luxury,—and all violent and permanent attachments whatsoever'.²⁸ Arnold formulates specific distinctions between various types and characteristics of madness. Expanding on Battie's dual differentiation, Arnold classifies insanity under five different headings, 'ideal', 'incoherent', 'sensitive', 'hypochondriacal' and 'maniacal', each relating to specific diagnostic behavioural symptoms. The maniacal patient exists predominately in a state of rational lucidity and:

and consequently knows... the true appearance, and situation of surrounding objects; knows what kind of place he is in, what persons, and what objects, are about him, and what he says,

and does; but yet has at times... ideas, or images, in the mind, of things existing externally, which do not... could not possibly so exist...²⁹

The maniacal madness described by Arnold evokes Lewis's monk Ambrosio's deterioration into delusional insanity, a man who oscillates between cold reason and irrational fancy. William Pargeter, writing in 1792, supplements Arnold's maniacal assessments and gives credence to a medical elucidation of Ambrosio's supposedly supernatural experiences when he observes that, 'Most of the maniacal cases that ever came under my observation, proceeded from religious enthusiasm'.³⁰

Initially, in *The Monk*, Lewis appears partially to adopt Anne Radcliffe's propensity to explain the supernatural.³¹ The supernatural experience of the Bleeding Nun for Raymond is intensely real, *physically* so as he clutches the spectre to his 'bosom' when he has mistaken her for Agnes; this is further supported by Theodore's presence who also witnesses the inexplicable spectral encounter. However, both are functioning in a heightened state of sublime arousal, one of fear, anticipation and additionally for Raymond, desire. Raymond is 'sensible of a sad and reverential horror', his 'bosom beat high'.³² Both he and Theodore have appropriated the supernatural tale of the Bleeding Nun to effect Agnes's escape. Raymond's superstition is evident as he looks up at the '*haunted* chamber' [my italics]. Therefore, the potential existence of a supernatural realm is already internally, and unconsciously, validated for Raymond and, paradoxically, materially validated as he *physically* conveys the apparition (one would usually assume a phantom to be insubstantial), to the carriage.³³

However, Raymond's mental and physical collapse following Agnes' failed elopement and his subsequent encounters with the spectral Bleeding Nun post-accident, is rationalised through narratorial reference to the fact that it is Raymond alone who is subject to this haunting: 'The ghost was not even visible to any eye but mine'.³⁴ Preceding this statement, a distinct, physiological explanatory narrative accounts for Raymond's disturbed and delusive mental state. On fleeing Lindenberg Castle, with whom he thinks is Agnes dressed as the bleeding nun, the resultant coach accident ends with Raymond striking his 'temple against a flint', the attending physician explains his ravings and terrifying visions thus: 'The gentleman is not quite in his right senses . . . 'tis the natural consequence of his fall'.³⁵ The insinuation here suggests a medical, and therefore rational, explanation for Raymond's spectral visions in line with Battie's categorization of *consequential madness*. Indeed, Lewis litters the narrative with lexical indicators which evoke a sceptical response in the reader to Raymond's *supernatural* plight. Hence, words and phrases such as 'delirious', 'malady', 'fancy', 'over-heated brain', 'restless', 'agitation', 'fever', contradict, and essentially deconstruct, the supernatural overtones.

A distinctly materialist convergence of mind and body manifests via the physiological consequences of Raymond's psychological instability:

Agnes and the bleeding nun presented themselves by turns to my fancy, and combined to harass and torment me. I woke fatigued and unrefreshed. My fever seemed rather augmented than diminished; *the agitation of my mind impeded my fractured bones from knitting* [my italics].³⁶

This pathologizing of Raymond's ghostly encounters post-accident destabilises Raymond's narrative, making it intrinsically unreliable, and thus calls into question the validity of his rapid psychological rehabilitation at the hands of the (supposed) Wandering Jew. He *alone* talks with Raymond and offers him deliverance through exorcism, and provides the historical narrative of Beatrice, the Bleeding Nun. Whether the Wandering Jew is a supernatural entity, or merely a charlatan with knowledge of Beatrice's story, and whose ritualistic exorcism subdues Raymond's psychological perturbations, is left unexplored. Given that Raymond has been subject to debilitating injury both physical, and psychological, and has been in a maniacal state where (echoing Pargeter), '*in certain respects, ideas, or images, in the mind, of things existing externally, which do not, and which in many cases, could not possibly so exist*', these post-accident supernatural occurrences are called into doubt.³⁷ Lewis has utilised a gothic schema, while at the same time undermining this schema. The lexical eruptions of materialist language illustrate a connective unity between the suffering mind and body, and evokes a distinctly anti-dualist perspective. Thus, when considering Lewis' supernatural deconstruction in this instance, could Ambrosio's exposure to the metaphysical and supernatural realm also be interpreted and explained within a fundamentally materialist framework?

Gothic scholar Jacqueline Howard (1994) observes that *The Monk* has been critically assessed as a study on repression, conflict and the unconscious.³⁸ Barry Doyle (2000) goes further and emphasises the notion of repressed desire in Lewis's novel illustrating that Ambrosio's desire resists firm analyses or diagnoses; desire functions as both familiar and unfamiliar.³⁹ Doyle articulates the fluid, fragmented nature of his desire which oscillates from dream state, to the physical, emotional and psychological realms. Although insightful, Doyle fails to address the actualization of Ambrosio's projected desire. Ambrosio's desire erupts from the repressive constraints of his dualistic Catholic monastic asceticism, and results in delusional (Arnoldian) maniacal insanity.

Expanding on Ed Cameron's (2010) analysis of obsessional neurosis and the absent mother in *The Monk* it can also be demonstrated that Ambrosio's neurosis emerges from a dualistic, split subjectivity.⁴⁰ In Draft K, 'The Neuroses of Defence' (1896) Sigmund Freud states that obsessional neurosis is a condition where certain uncontrollable visualisations, ideational thoughts and words interfere with normal patterns of thought so that the subject's ability to think and act freely is compromised. At a heightened level this develops into paranoiac episodes which, in its most extreme

form, elicits delusional hallucinatory instances, primarily in the form of voices. The returning images and voices of repressed memories are:

distorted by being replaced by analogous images from the present day...[A]t this point, with the return of the repressed in distorted form, the defence has at once failed; and the assimilatory delusions cannot be interpreted as a symptom of secondary defence but as a beginning of an alteration of the ego...The process reaches its conclusion...in protective delusions (megalomania), till the ego has been completely remodelled.⁴¹

Freud asserts that once the ego has been refashioned then the 'determining element of paranoia is the mechanism of projection involving the refusal of belief in the self-reproach'⁴² Lewis' characterisation of Ambrosio's mental decline appears to prefigure Freud's psychoanalytical analyses while drawing on contemporary accounts of madness as seen in Arnold and Pargeter. Hence, Lewis foregrounds the problematics of a dualist conception of what it means to be a human when subject to a fundamentally material existence. Although it is more challenging to rationalise Ambrosio's encounters with demon spirits and the devil himself as 'natural', rather than supernatural, if one places Ambrosio in the previously mentioned Freudian theoretical framework, this can become the locus for an alternative interpretation, one that focuses on Ambrosio's dissolution, and subsequent split subjectivity, in materialist terms.

Ambrosio, subject to ascetic conditioning by the Capuchin monastic order throughout his pre-pubescent formative years, has been forced to repress all libidinal desires. The dual conception of soul and body, intrinsic to his religious belief and undertakings, necessitates a rejection of material flesh in favour of the veneration of metaphysical spirit. Abandoned and orphaned as an infant, he is cloistered in the monastery until adulthood, away from the physical reality of material woman. Ambrosio's memories of womanhood, in the form of his mother, remain latent and repressed within his unconscious. When the reader is first introduced to Ambrosio's personal meditations in the privacy of his cell, if drawing on Freud's theory of obsessional neurosis, it is no surprise to observe the monk's obsession with the painting of the 'Madona'. We learn that the 'Madona' has 'been the object' of Ambrosio's 'increasing wonder and adoration' for 'two years'.⁴³ His fervent idolatry of the intangible representation of the untainted, and perfect, maternal conception of the feminine has provoked a burgeoning internal desire. This desire is expressed in phrasing that demonstrates the material physicality of object possession, undermining the metaphysical connotation of the 'Madona':

'What beauty in that countenance!' he continued after a silence... 'Oh! If such a creature existed, and existed but for me! Were I permitted to twine round my fingers those golden ringlets, and press with my lips the treasures of that snowy bosom! gracious God, should I then resist the temptation?... Away, impure ideas... What charms me, when ideal and

considered as a superior being, would disgust me, become woman and tainted with all the failings of mortality'.⁴⁴

Through the obsessional nature of Ambrosio's desire, one can already see his *refusal of self-reproach* given his focus on tainted female mortality. The seeds of his megalomaniacal and delusional denial are apparent in his expostulatory certitude, 'Ambrosio is proof against temptation. Temptation, did I say? To me it would be none'.⁴⁵ Temptation arrives in the form of Matilda, a woman disguised as the novice monk Rosario. However, if one studies Lewis' narrative and applies Freud's 'Neurosis of Defence' paranoid theory, there is a distinct suggestion that Matilda does not in fact exist in female form at all, but is a projection of Ambrosio's repressed memory and desire of, and for, the ideal mother figure. This is compounded by his active guilt and conditioned internal moral abhorrence at the homosexual sensibilities which Rosario evokes within the monk. Lewis ironically alludes to Ambrosio's tunnel-vision with Don Christovel's assertion that he, 'is reported to be so strict an observer of chastity, that he knows not in what consists the difference of man and woman'.⁴⁶

Clara Tuite (1997) and Max Fincher (2006) have both identified the homoerotic subtext that informs the relationship between Ambrosio and Rosario/Matilda although both accept Matilda exists in female form.⁴⁷ The obsessional neurosis that has escalated in Ambrosio's psyche through his continued infatuation with the 'Madona', has awoken repressed libidinal motivations which can be readily satisfied through relations with one he has already formed an emotional bond with: 'Ambrosio on his side did not feel less attracted towards the youth; with him alone did he lay aside his habitual severity. When he spoke to him, he insensibly assumed a tone milder than was usual to him; and no voice sounded so sweet to him as did Rosario's'.⁴⁸ The censure of such relations in society, and before the eyes of God, would render Ambrosio socially and spiritually damned. To fulfil his desire, it can be argued, that Ambrosio unconsciously projects the ideal 'Madona' onto Rosario which, in turn, because of his devout religious habituation, causes him to disintegrate psychologically into paranoid delusion and hallucinatory insanity. Through the consummation of his desires, Ambrosio becomes subject to the Freudian *alteration of the ego* and thus plummets from the pious, reverent monk, to libidinous libertine, until his ego is completely remodelled in the form of heinous rapist and murderer - almost akin to the devil himself.

At no point in the text do we witness any character other than Ambrosio conversing with Matilda in female form. All the supernatural episodes and visitations by spirits, demons, and the devil himself, are observed by Ambrosio and Matilda alone. Thus, if we consider Ambrosio is subject to psychological conditions of neurosis and paranoia, then what he appears to experience can be rationalised within the diagnostic framework of hallucinatory madness. Indeed, Ambrosio *himself* rationalises the ghostly return of Antonia's murdered mother Elvira:

The abbot strove to re-assure her and convince her that the whole had been a deception of her over-heated fancy. The solitude in which she had passed the evening, the gloom of the night, the book which she had been reading, and the room in which she sat, were all calculated to place before her such a vision. He treated the idea of ghosts with ridicule, and produced strong arguments to prove the fallacy of such a system.⁴⁹

Ambrosio exhibits aspects of Arnold's description of maniacal insanity where the subject oscillates between cold reason, and irrational fancy. The day previously, the frenzied Ambrosio had cast a supernatural enchantment to enable him to ravish the unsuspecting Antonia in her sleep, and had murdered her mother when caught in the attempted act. Yet, he attends to Antonia, and her abject distress, in a state of measured calm and cold reasoning.

It is in Ambrosio's final scenes that a distinct narratorial allusion to his delusional and hallucinatory madness emerges and supports rational interpretation outside of *The Monk's* supernatural schema. When Ambrosio is eventually imprisoned by his Inquisitors, the full extent of his ego remodelling is realised. Gone is the devout man of absolute restraint and moral integrity; the man who, 'has never been known to transgress a single rule of his order; the smallest stain is not to be discovered on his character...[t]he common people therefore esteem him to be a saint'.⁵⁰ In its place is a creature who has 'abandoned himself to the transports of desperate rage: he sorrowed for the punishment of his crimes, not their commission; and exhaled his bosom's anguish in idle sighs, in vain lamentations, in blasphemy and despair'.⁵¹ His tormented ravings are accompanied by 'dreadful visions...[h]e found himself in sulphurous realms and burning caverns, surrounded by fiends appointed his tormentors, and who drove him through a variety of tortures, each of which was more dreadful than the former...[H]is terrors were so violent as nearly to annihilate his mental powers'.⁵² While in the depths of this psychological malaise Ambrosio is visited by Matilda who has escaped the inquisition and materialised before Ambrosio. In this final psychological projection Matilda implores Ambrosio to seek freedom, and abandon God, through selling his soul as she has done. Ambrosio at last resists Matilda's temptations and, rather than face further excruciating torture at the hands of the Grand Inquisitor, makes a complete confession of his crimes. It is perhaps here, more than at any time throughout the novel, that the reader witnesses the dualistic splitting, and subsequent projection, of the split subject that is Ambrosio. Matilda represents the absolute nihilistic rejection of all that is good in Ambrosio; in resisting Matilda at this final juncture, Ambrosio wrests back what little is left of his original ego position. Unyielding to absolute ego remodelling, which entails the absolute loss of self and descent into consummate madness, Ambrosio finally foregoes the refusal of self-reproach, and accepts culpability for his actions.

Feminist scholar Karen F. Stein (1983) analyses female madness in Gothic narratives, illustrating the tension between acceptable femininity and the monstrous feminine. She suggests female madness arises through behaviours which are condemned as personally and socially irredeemable. In later Gothic narratives these subjective aberrations are circumvented through acceptance of what was once deemed monstrous. However, the unredeemed (female) monster, Stein argues, is a firm feature of the genre in its infancy.⁵³ Although Stein suggests this is indicative of the female Gothic, this can be equally applied to Ambrosio's state. He exhibits both a monstrous hidden self, and the 'subjective aberration' of madness. Ambrosio can never be accepted back into society, such are the nature of his awful crimes; in this regard, he is *unredeemable*. Indeed, Ambrosio's victory of self is short-lived. His split subjectivity can no longer be socially reintegrated. His identity cannot be restored; its absolute fragmentation leads to insanity.⁵⁴ Sentenced to execution, and thus the possibility of meeting his maker whom he has turned so heinously against, Ambrosio with 'terrors increased' and raving in 'delirious passion', succumbs to the final temptation. He summons the daemon to save him from his impending doom.⁵⁵ In juxtaposition to the intense physicality of Ambrosio's psychological sufferings, Lewis invokes the supernatural, but this invocation enhances the materiality of Ambrosio's situation rather than situating it as a metaphysical experience. The Daemon is lexically depicted using a tangible, gothic materiality. With 'blasted limbs', 'long talons', 'enormous sable wings' and hair of 'living snakes' emitting 'frightful hissings', the Daemon is *materially* manifest.⁵⁶

When Ambrosio's psyche is confronted by the Devil incarnate, he comes face to face with the projected 'ugliness' of his own being which has been infused with the enormity of his crimes and absolute self-loathing.⁵⁷ In relinquishing his soul to the daemon, he also relinquishes it to his daemon *self*. Thus, Ambrosio sacrifices the last traces of his original ego position. His ego remodelling becomes absolute as he is mutilated and dashed upon the rocks. Once again, the supernatural is juxtaposed with extreme gothic materialist lexical detail: 'darting his talons into the monk's shaven crown, he sprang from the rock...[t]he daemon continued to soar aloft, till reaching a dreadful height, he released the sufferer'. Ambrosio 'bruised and mangled', with 'broken and dislocated limbs', and eagles that 'tore his flesh piecemeal and dug out his eyeballs', suffers a complete physical and psychological annihilation of self; all that is Ambrosio is gone.⁵⁸

Conclusion

Gothic scholar Robert Miles (2000), drawing on Edmund Burke's theory of the sublime (1756), states that the inherent difference between Lewis's and Radcliffe's gothic narratives is Radcliffe's reliance on 'terror', which is 'the basis of the sublime', and purely an 'affair of the mind'. However, he argues, Lewis focuses on 'horror' which is fundamentally material in approach.⁵⁹ It is this very

physicality of Lewis's work that suggests a material interpretation and undermines aspects of the supernatural elements in *The Monk*. Human beings are material in nature, they are motivated by instincts and physical desires that need to be explored; it is only in doing so that they can be contained.

Through Ambrosio, Lewis implies that the mind and the body are not separate entities. Separating the two and negating one in favour of the other leads to both psychological and physical malaise where unconscious eruptions take place, and the ego is severely compromised. If one adopts an atheist materialist position, these internal conflicts are nullified. There is no demarcated soul, and therefore no eternal damnation, only human made laws and morals to contend with. Although materialism may negate psychological eruptions caused by strict religious dualism, Lewis also illustrates the problematics of materialism. The abject slaughter of St Ursula at the hands of the mob explicitly foregrounds the ambivalence toward the human subject that objectified materialism, taken to its extreme, suggests. Ultimately, humans are easily expendable masses of flesh, 'unsightly', 'shapeless' and 'disgusting'.⁶⁰ While materialism proposes freedom from moral strictures imposed by revealed religion, law or philosophy, it also poses questions for individual agency and responsibility. Ultimately, if humans are no more than material objects, behaviourally determined by their internal drives, passions, desires and proclivities, and not answerable to divine laws or divine retribution, then what is the need for virtue? By adopting a gothic materialist narrative, Lewis implicitly critiques both dualism *and* materialism and demonstrates that extreme Enlightenment philosophical positioning, fails to explain the complexities of real, lived human experience.

¹ Andrew Smith, *Gothic Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007): 3.

² Fred Botting, *The Gothic*. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001): 1. The term eighteenth-century gothic is utilised here in concurrence with Fred Botting's assertion that the term gothic cannot be spoken of with an "assurance"; the gothic genre has itself split into numerous distinctions "Victorian Gothic, modern Gothic, postmodern Gothic . . . female Gothic, queer Gothic, Gothic science-fiction, urban Gothic" which all carry their own definitive weight, (1).

³ Ibid., "It is as explorations of mysterious supernatural energies, immense natural forces, and deep, dark human fears and desires that gothic texts apparently found their appeal. Emerging at a time when enlightenment reason, science and empiricism were in the ascendancy, the attraction of Gothic darkness, passion, superstition or violence came from prohibition and taboos, and was not the positive expression of hidden natural instincts and wishes", (2-3).

⁴ Clara Tuite, "Cloistered Closets: Enlightenment Pornography, The Confessional State, Homosexual Persecution and *The Monk*," *Romanticism on the Net*. 8, (Nov 1997). Accessed 22 October 2020. <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/005766ar>

⁵ Louis F. Peck, *A Life of Matthew G. Lewis*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961): 19.

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- ⁶ Angela Wright, "European disruptions of the idealized woman: Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* and the Marquis de Sade's *La Nouvelle Justine*" in *European Gothic a Spirited Exchange, 1760-1960*, ed. Avril Horner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017): 40.
- ⁷ Peck, 1-4.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 4-9.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 10-14.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15-16.
- ¹¹ Lauren Fitzgerald, "Crime, Punishment, Criticism: The Monk as Prolepsis," *Gothic Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2003): 43-54.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 47.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 47.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 46-48.
- ¹⁵ Peck., 34-35.
- ¹⁶ Epicurus. *Letters, Principal Doctrines and Vatican Sayings*, trans. Russel M. Geer (New York: Macmillan, 1964). Epicurus overcomes rigid determinism through invoking the void as a space in which atoms can swerve from a seemingly determined path. In proposing potential divergence, Epicurus negotiates a somewhat tenuous space for individual free-will in Lucretius. *On the Nature of the Universe*. Trans. Ronald Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): 253-257.
- ¹⁷ Renee Descartes, *Descartes: Key Philosophical Writings* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1997): 140.
- ¹⁸ John Heil, *Philosophy of Mind: A Contemporary Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2004): 22.
- ¹⁹ Julien Offray de La Mettrie, "Machine Man" in *Machine Man and Other Writings*. Trans. and ed. Ann Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 11-23.
- ²⁰ Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception and Canon Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 80.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² *Ibid.*
- ²³ Dale Townshend, "Gothic Visions, Romantic Acoustics," *Gothic Technologies: Visuality in the Romantic Era. Romantic Circles Praxis Series* (Dec 2005) Accessed 22 October 2020. <https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/gothic/townshend/townshend.html>
- ²⁴ Jeremy Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul: Religion, Moral Philosophy and Madness in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007): Chapters 6 and 7.
- ²⁵ Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason: How the Enlightenment Transformed the Way We See Our Bodies and Souls* (London: Penguin, 2004). Porter states there were 'clear affinities between the manifestations of the religious lunatic fringe and lunatics proper: convulsions, seizures, glossolalia, visions and hallucinations, psychopathic violence (as with regicides), weepings and wailings', (305-306).
- ²⁶ Nicholas Robinson, "A New System of the Spleen, Vapours and Hypochondriack Melancholy, Wherein all the Decays of the Nerves, and the Lowness of the Spirits are Mechanically Accounted for... [1729]" in *Patterns of Madness in the Eighteenth Century: A Reader*, ed. Allan Ingram (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998): 80.
- ²⁷ William Battie, "A Treatise on Madness [1758]" in *Patterns of Madness in the Eighteenth Century: A Reader*, ed. Allan Ingram (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998): 43-45.
- ²⁸ Thomas Arnold, "Observations on the Nature, Kinds, Causes and Prevention of Insanity [1782-86]" in *Patterns of Madness in the Eighteenth Century: A Reader*, ed. Allan Ingram (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998): 165.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 170.
- ³⁰ William Pargeter, "Observations on Maniacal Disorders [1792]" in *Patterns of Madness in the Eighteenth Century: A Reader*, ed. Allan Ingram (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998): 180-181.
- ³¹ Jacqueline Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction. A Bakhtinian Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994): 209.
- ³² Matthew Lewis, *The Monk-A Romance*, [1796] (London: Penguin, 1998): 135-136.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 136.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 143.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 137; 139
- ³⁶ Lewis, 141.
- ³⁷ Arnold qut. in Ingram, 170.
- ³⁸ Howard, *The Monk* "has been read as an exploration of the workings of repressed and conflicting fears and desires, of the unconscious, or of what lies outside of direct representation" (223-224).

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- ³⁹ Barry Doyle, "Freud and the Schizoid in Ambrosio: Determining Desire in *The Monk*," *Gothic Studies* 2. 1 (May 2000), "*The Monk*, obviously is about desire, but it is about a desire that can in no way be comfortably diagnosed and analysed. *The Monk*'s desire is disruptive, manic, strangely familiar and foreign", (61).
- ⁴⁰ See Ed Cameron, 'Matthew Lewis and the Gothic Horror of Obsessional Neurosis' in *The Psychopathology of the Gothic Romance: Perversion, Neuroses and Psychosis in the Early Works of the Genre* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 2010): 133-155.
- ⁴¹ Sigmund Freud, 'Draft K-The Neuroses of Defence' in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995): 95.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Lewis, 39.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Lewis, 19.
- ⁴⁷ Max Fincher, "The Gothic as Camp: Queer Aesthetics in *The Monk*," *The Gothic, from Ann Radcliffe to Anne Rice*, n.pag. Fincher, Max. "The Gothic as Camp: Queer Aesthetics in *The Monk*." *The Gothic, from Ann Radcliffe to Anne Rice, Romanticism on the Net*, 44 (Nov 2006) Accessed 22 October 2020. <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/013997ar>
- ⁴⁸ Lewis, 41.
- ⁴⁹ Lewis, 282.
- ⁵⁰ Lewis, 19.
- ⁵¹ Lewis, 364.
- ⁵² Ibid.
- ⁵³ Karen F. Stein, "Monsters and Madwomen: Changing Female Gothic," *The Female Gothic*, ed. Julean E. Fleenor (Montreal: Eden, 1983): 123.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., 124.
- ⁵⁵ Lewis, 368.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 369.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ⁵⁸ Lewis, 376.
- ⁵⁹ Robert Miles, "Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis" in *A Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Pinter (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000): 41. See also Edmund Burke, 'Part One, Section VII: Of the Sublime' in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* [1756] (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2008), whose theory of the sublime influenced the Gothic movement toward the latter part of the eighteenth century, defines the sublime thus: "[w]hatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling," (111). He expands on this in 'Part Two, Section I: Of the Passion Caused by the Sublime': "The passion caused by the great and sublime in *nature*, when those causes operate most powerfully, is astonishment: and astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it," (130). Thus, for Burke, the emotion elicited by instances of the sublime impact comprehensively on the mind itself, so much so that the sublime object itself becomes all-encompassing and beyond reason. Whilst Lewis's text focuses on the material aspects of horror, this aspect of the sublime, contrary to Miles's assertion, is certainly present within the novel and is evidenced by both Raymond's and Ambrosio's supposedly supernatural experiences.
- ⁶⁰ Lewis, 306.

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