

Emotional Unmasking of Power Relations

*Instability of Gender and Power Roles in
M.G. Lewis's The Monk*



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Norwegian Abstract - Norsk samandrag

Matthew G. Lewis sin gotiske roman, *The Monk*, skildrar det kyrkjelege og det sekulære samfunn der normer regjerer, og karakterane lever opp til den rolla som er forventa av dei. Etersom Lewis stiller kritiske spørsmål til normene som utgjer samfunnstrukturen, nyttar han gotiske element for å framheve sin kritikk av kyrkja og deira moralske posisjon i samfunnet. Dei ulike karakterane spelar ei rolle i Lewis sin kritikk, og det er posisjonane deira og endringa av desse som er fokuset i denne avhandlinga. Kjønnroller og kyrkja sine moralske ideal er brukte som sosiale masker for å dekkje over karakterane sin natur som syner seg å vere anten typisk god eller vond når maskene blir fjerna. Dei gotiske elementa i romanen skaper kjensler som overvinn fornufta som maskene er avhengige av. Det sublime og det "the uncanny" tek over karakterane sin opptreden innanfor dei sette normene til samfunnet slik at deira verklege natur kjem fram i dagens lys. I det typane blir avslørte, blir også maktforholda mellom karakterane skipla. Dei moralsk korrekte og dei makthavande mister sitt grep om posisjonane sine og dermed blir også kjønnrollene øydelagde.

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Introduction

The publication of the gothic novel *The Monk*, by Matthew G. Lewis in 1796 was followed by reactions which caused Lewis to alter the novel and publish it anew without the most critiqued passages (Maclachlan 10). The novel's portrayal of the Catholic Church's hypocrisy and immorality in general was the cause of the strong reactions concerning the work in question. In the 1998 introduction to the novel, Christopher Maclachlan addresses Samuel Taylor Coleridge's critique of the novel and its "lack of moral truth" which might "corrupt readers" as "it is a book which if a parent saw in the hands of a son or daughter he might reasonably turn pale" (10). At that time, reading novels was mostly a feminine pastime, and *The Monk* was not suited for women's "delicate" minds which could easily be influenced by its content. In accordance with gender roles of the time, the feminine ideal was to be innocent and ignorant of the true nature of life regarding sexuality (Armstrong 105). This is why the violent depiction of rape and murder in the novel was considered destructive to the feminine ideal as it would "pollute" the model of purity to which a woman should aspire, as she was to be the so-called "innocent maiden," completely ignorant of sexuality and its desires (Armstrong 104).

The patriarchal structure of society turned out to be strengthened by the Age of Enlightenment that developed as a result of scientific focus and which promoted the power of knowledge (Outram 106). As biology came to shed light upon physical differences between man and woman these were used to uphold the old patriarchy where the male is in a position superior to that of the female because physically a man is stronger, and therefore considered to be intellectually stronger as well. (92). This is why knowledge reserved for women was "fixed upon novels, newspapers and conversation, and not upon the seemingly more practical areas of knowledge" (Armstrong 131). The woman's brain was smaller than a man's, or

“more nearly resembling the brain of a youth” (Appleton 311). Therefore she could neither achieve nor manage intellectually demanding work like “abstract philosophy, science, and art” (311).

However, the importance of science and knowledge in the Age of Reason resulted in a counter-movement which revolved around the importance of emotions and sentiments. As a consequence, the sentimental novel displaying emotional characters and strong feelings gave rise to the gothic novel which seeks to affect the reader with conflicting emotions through the use of terrifying settings with old castles, dark woods, cold vaults and graveyards.

Furthermore, powerful supernatural beings were introduced as characters in these novels. The element of the supernatural stands in stark contrast to the eighteenth century’s reasonable mind as it constitutes the “transgression of natural and moral laws, aesthetic rules and social taboos” (Botting 1). This was also why *The Monk* was perceived morally unsuitable for tender minds.

It is the use of gothic components and how they create strong emotions and thereby alterations in the characters and the power relations between them which I will examine in this thesis. In the Age of the Enlightenment even emotions were theorized. One such theory is Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* which I will employ in my character analysis to explain how the gothic setting and the atmosphere which it creates generate passions which seem to determine the characters’ reactions and behaviour. Burke’s theory of the sublime was published around the same time as *The Monk*, and both works complement each other and underscore the significance of emotions. Burke’s theory will therefore be used to elucidate the personality changes which many of Lewis’s character go through. The notion of the sublime will provide an explanation of how the overwhelming sensations displayed by the novel’s characters can affect their unmasking. The character transformations which occur in the last part of the novel will in

particular be examined in the light of psychological reactions caused by sublime experiences. According to Burke, the sublime is “the strongest emotion the mind is capable of feeling” (51), and under its influence “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” (72). Therefore, since the sublime has a great impact on the mind, it seems to affect alteration in its characters’ personalities in such a way that the novel’s critique of the Catholic Church is highlighted. I will also examine the connection between novel’s gothic setting and the sublime.

Lewis brings together two worlds, the secular and the clerical, and he portrays the characters belonging to these spheres. He illustrates the power relations between the novel’s two settings and between the various characters. It will also be seen that feelings aroused by the beautiful and of terror cause emotional turmoil in and between the characters. Since Burke debates the difference between the beautiful and the sublime, his theory will be applied to understand the characters’ reactions as they are exposed to beauty and terror linked to the novel’s gothic elements. The beautiful, according to Burke, has only one effect; namely pleasure, it can therefore not be the cause of the sublime since the sublime is dependent upon opposing feelings of both pain and delight (158). The sublime is an intermixing of feelings which completely overpowers one’s mind and which cannot be produced by pleasure alone. A contradictory sensation is necessary to create this conflicting emotional experience. The gothic novel constructs tension between good and evil which is reflected in struggles between characters and also in confrontations between reason and emotions. The portrayal of these feelings is important in order to create an understanding of the sublime and how it effects character unmasking.

Since this thesis’ focus is on a gothic novel and the emotions which cause characters to be transformed, Sigmund Freud’s essay on “The Uncanny” offers helpful insights for the

understanding of the construction of characters in the novel. Freud makes use of a gothic story by E. T. A. Hoffmann, *The Sand Man*, to explain the effect of what he refers to as the uncanny, which he asserts to be something familiar becoming unfamiliar (52). In order to explain his views he addresses different incidents which can cause this feeling: repetition, the notion of the double or simply a reflection. The uncanny in these experiences is the feeling created when a person senses that something or someone is familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. Since the characters of Lewis's novel on several occasions are portrayed in situations similar to those mentioned above, I will use the uncanny to shed light on their reactions and behaviour. The feeling of the uncanny also creates doubt about identity and existence: "the uncanny involves feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced" (Royle 1). The uncanny creates confusion since what is supposed to be unknown has come to light and made itself known. What has been repressed and hidden is revealed, and thus the true personality of a person or a character, the repressed, surfaces. That is why Freud's understanding of the uncanny may facilitate the interpretation of *The Monk's* character transformations.

The gothic novel is said to portray types of characters rather than characters that develop throughout the narrative. The characters in Lewis's *The Monk* are at first presented to the reader inside a church and are portrayed as ordinary members of the congregation. An omniscient voice gives the reader a first impression of their personalities and also their position in society. It is not until later in the narrative that the characters' true nature is revealed. The first part of the novel revolves around the church's external mask of morality and the secular society's social masks based on gender and class. The first chapter of my thesis will concentrate on the differences between the clerical and the secular world as depicted in the novel. Their moral ideals and gendered roles will be examined and compared to show how the fixed roles assigned to men and women in the two settings are reflected in

the characters' behaviour and reactions. The power structures tied to these roles will be explored, and also the underlying critique of the falsity of these roles. The role of the protagonist of the novel, the monk Ambrosio, will be closely looked into to show that false purity is the basis of his authority, and also to demonstrate how his personality highlights Lewis's criticism of the Catholic Church.

In the second part of the novel, the holiness of the church is uncovered as a mask behind which sin resides, and society's fixed gender roles are portrayed as masks needed to hide the characters' true potential. Under the influence of the gothic elements of darkness and death, the characters are unmasked and the gothic types are presented. The masks come off as a result of the strong emotions which the gothic elements create. Therefore, the most prominent characters undergo a transformation from seemingly ordinary men and women, who respect their society's gendered roles to gothic types of villains and victims to whom their society's norms are of no consequence. It is this change in the characters' personalities and the following breakdown of power structures and gendered roles that I will examine and explain in the light of the sublime and the uncanny.

The characters' pattern of behaviour can be perceived as the realisation of the gendered norms by which we all live since human beings are socialized into believing that gender roles are either/or positions. However, gender is not biological, it is a role played to fit into society's expectations. Society's norms can be realized in different ways and therefore gender is a variable. There is one set of norms for men and another one for women, and each individual is expected to respect the boundaries set for his or her sex. Gender is thus a social construction which is based on performativity while sexuality is what we are born as, either female or male. This is in accordance with Judith Butler's view in *Gender Trouble* where she argues that gender is performative, that it is a doing rather than a being (33). Even though

gender is a doing, the feminine has been and still is associated with women, and masculinity is expected of men.

Gender as doing, has lately been questioned in different media. Therefore the topic of this thesis becomes part of the ongoing debate, especially since academic research on gender has been under attack and accused of disregarding the effect of biology. My work on this thesis, made me realize that the notions of the masculine and the feminine, presuppose the existence of biological sex. The norms which have been set for the feminine and the masculine are based on binaries which are reflected in two sexes, the female and the male. However, that being said, the biological sex does not require that there should be any social difference between man and woman like gender roles do. Therefore it is obvious that the gendered norms of our society are constructed and position the two sexes in different power roles. In the context of the novel the masculine characters dominate the feminine. However, as soon as the characters are overpowered by emotions, their gender roles are undermined and their true nature is exposed and controls their behaviour.

The novel portrays a patriarchal society which maintains the idea that women are subordinate to men. All institutions, family, society at large and the church, rely on patriarchal thinking which they employ to front power structures. The church claims to have been given its power from God whose will it should implement on earth. Therefore, its Christian norms of decency and correctness influence the secular society so that it is designed according to patriarchal ideals promoted by the church. People are expected to conform to God's will which also the gendered roles are based on. The church is at first portrayed as morally pure and a place for people to be educated in ethic principles. However, the church's spokesman, the monk Ambrosio, who is supposed to be the example of purity which the congregation should look up to, is revealed as false, and thus the novel's design to question the morale of the Catholic Church is emphasized. One of the reasons why *The Monk* was perceived immoral

was that its critique of the clergy posed a threat to society's established norms which were to maintain the patriarchal structure endorsed by the Church.

Even though this novel was written in the eighteenth century, the same debate concerning the Catholic Church's morality and norms is topical in the twenty-first century. Lately, several incidences of sexual assault committed by priests living in celibacy have been revealed. It seems that the novel questions what is still a current topic in our contemporary society.

The novel focuses on the binaries of morality and immorality or good and bad. These contradictory forces reflect the binary relationship of the feminine and the masculine. Binaries of good and evil are mirrored in the double roles of the feminine and the masculine. In order to understand the characters' binary belonging it is necessary to examine their roles both before and after the gothic elements and confronting emotions transform their relationships and roles. Therefore the first chapter of this thesis will focus on the mapping of the gender roles and the characters' performances within the norms of these roles as portrayed in the first part of the novel. Butler's *Gender Trouble* will be used to illustrate that gender is a construction and therefore not a constant. This view will be explored further in my second chapter where the focus will be on the characters' transformations caused by the gothic elements and contradicting emotions described in the last part of the novel. Burke and Freud's respective insights will shed light upon how emotions overpower the mind, and thus uncover the characters' true nature.

Chapter I Gender Roles and Power Structure

Lewis joins the novel's two worlds, the clerical and the secular, for contrasting purposes.

Thus he shows that the so-called ideal society of the church is morally flawed. The church is supposed to offer spiritual and behavioural guidance to society at large. It assumes hierarchical superiority by setting the standard for common people's lives. However, Lewis's novel questions and dismantles its authority. The gothic setting and a foreign country (Spain) provide Lewis with the necessary distance to the ideal society, the aim of his critique.

The author uses the notions of masking and unmasking in his portrayal of characters and the power positions which they hold. Thus, he shows that identity is a matter of performance with regard to moral, class and gender issues.

The novel's principle is that a set of norms determines the individual's place in society. Socially constructed codes of behaviour control people and position them in preordained roles. Therefore the clerical habit does not guarantee that the person who wears it embodies what the robe stands for. Gender roles are also designed to control and dominate and are not based on biology. Individuals are expected to perform in accordance with the roles they have been assigned, and Lewis's novel explains what happens when rules are transgressed, masks are ripped off and roles are reversed.

1.1 Gender Roles and Social Acceptance

Gendered roles reflect the binary of the masculine and the feminine, and in the novel the characters are presented in pairs which reflect this gendered binary. Dualism is not only manifested in the novel's characters, its two settings form a binary between the secular and the clerical world, each of which has its specific understanding of gender roles. It will

therefore be necessary to set the two societies and their different roles against one another in order to explore the differences and similarities between the opposing characters, and thus I hope to show which characteristics construct the feminine and the masculine within the two societies portrayed in the narrative. The sacral society's ideals are pictured as morally superior to those of the secular society, but as will be seen, these ideals often have to yield to more worldly temptations, and even gender roles are not absolute, since the relationship between power and gender and the hypocrisy of the church are two of the novel's main themes.

In order fully to understand the term of gender, the difference between gender and sexuality must be clarified. Sexuality is what we are born with, as either man or woman; whereas gender is a cultural construction created by society and reflected in our behaviour. Gender is fashioned by society's expectations and might therefore vary from time to time and from one society to another. In order to be accepted as feminine or masculine one has to comply with certain rules of conduct which set boundaries for what men and women can do, say or even think. To stay within these social boundaries, one needs to perform a role according to the norms. The notion of the performative gender is supported by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (25). Gender is an effect of society's norms, and is thus a social and not a biological category. It is created by institutions, practices and discourses (25).

The traditional perception of gender has been that there exist clear differences between the feminine and the masculine. Ann Rosalind Jones affirms that the traditional gender roles were maintained and supported by Conduct books in the 17th and 18th centuries. They state that the female is "physically and intellectually inferior to man, given to hysterical and irrational outburst," and that law "defined married women as coverts, subsumed under their husbands' economic and civic identity and incapable of making legal contracts on their own" (40). In *The Monk*, women are positioned in accordance with this. They are subordinate to the

men in society at large. Lewis does not anywhere in the text state the exact historic period in which his story is set, but it must be within the time of the Spanish Inquisition, i.e. between 1450 and 1750 (Levack 1). This is seen from the fact that one of the novel's minor characters, a gardener at the convent, expresses his fear of the Inquisition (162), and at the end of the novel its main character, Ambrosio, is said to be "a prisoner of the Holy Office" (360). Thus, the position of women in the novel probably also reflects the patriarchal society in Spain of this period. Women were considered men's property and had little opportunity to govern their own lives (Jones 40). In the secular society marriage was the height of a woman's career. An unmarried woman had to rely on a male relative to be provided for, and was often considered a burden to her family. Finding an acceptable husband was therefore a necessity as well as a duty which did not only involve the woman herself, but also her closest family. Therefore a young woman was watched over in order to protect her virtue and reputation to make her an eligible wife. If a husband was not found, life in a convent was considered an honourable option. The latter lifestyle was also looked upon as a sort of marriage, but in a spiritual sense. For nuns to "abstain from all sexual contact and intercourse" comes to take the form "of being married to God" (Keene 82).

The novel portrays characters from both the clerical and the secular society. As they interact, they are affected by the gendered roles no matter what position they hold or to what society they belong. It will also be seen that the main characters of the novel struggle and fail when it comes to fulfilling their society's norms for their gender.

Since the novel belongs to the Gothic tradition, specific techniques and forms affect the story's theme. The setting of the story is either the church or the convent or the streets and life outside the church. In Jacqueline Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction* we are presented to the conventions perceived as common to the genre: "We find, for example, references to the setting of a remote castle, monastery, or a gloomy house with its confining crypts, vaults, and

underground passage ways” and “particular character types such as the persecuted heroine, tyrannical parent, [or] villainous monk” (13). Gothic literature also draws on binary relations of good and bad. In *The Monk* Antonia, who is described as a young and innocent virgin, is a representative of the good, and Ambrosio, who later on in the narrative turns into a villainous monk, is a symbol of the bad. As Gothic literature makes use of dualism in this way, it maintains the mood and the setting of the gothic environment which creates “mysterious supernatural energies, immense natural forces, and deep, dark human fears and desires” (Botting 2). Here, too, we see the contradictory moods brought together as both desire and fear govern the frame of the gothic. The contrasting types created in Gothic literature are reflected in society’s patriarchal structure which enhances the opposing roles of the two sexes. The functions which the characters encompass coincide with the traditional gender roles. Like gender roles are a construct of society’s norms, the literary characters are constructed in compliance with the reigning gender roles.

The novel displays the Catholic Church as a micro-society which functions as an inspector of morality within society at large. This is seen from Ambrosio’s speech to his congregation when he talks about the “the vices of humanity” and describes the punishment reserved for the sinners after death (20). The residents of the monasteries and convents represent the ideal lifestyle devoted to God and his Church. The monks and nuns must separate themselves from the outside society and refrain from their natural urges. The ideal of the clergy is to disavow sexuality and devote their life only to God and his will. This distinguishes them from everyman in the secular world. In the context of the novel, Ambrosio fascinates people outside the monastery since they cannot easily relate to the monk’s strict ideal of chastity:

His knowledge is said to be the most profound, his eloquence the most persuasive. In the whole course of his life he has never been known to transgress a single rule of his

order, the smallest stain is not to be discovered upon his character; and he is reported to be so strict an observer of chastity, that he knows not in what consists the difference of man and woman. The common people therefore esteem him to be a saint. (19)

The laws of celibacy create an appearance of purity which everyman lacks. This purity is what they admire. It implies that he has rid himself of the sinful outside world where people live by their own rules and not by God's will.

However, since the Catholic Church is a hierarchical institution different roles are also performed within the Church. Even the roles of gender are at play. The fact that monks and nuns do not live together is an illustration of this. Furthermore, the most prominent positions are held by men. The nuns have to go to a priest in order to get absolution from their sins. The novel demonstrates this by showing how the prioress and all the nuns go to Ambrosio for confession (43). He has the authority to say that God has forgiven them. The gendered norms of the clerical society forbid females to perform the holy sacrament of absolution. Hence, the church seems to support the gender roles of the secular society where the male rates higher than the female. It might be argued that religion itself, just like gender roles, is a construct which reflects the social norms of the time from which it originates.

Ann Jones claims that religion defines women as subject to man since the Fall, "owing him obedience to compensate for Eve's sins" (40). The same gendered positions are clearly stated in the Bible, for instance in St Paul's letter to the Ephesians where he gives the following advice to married women: "Wives submit yourselves to your husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything." (*King James Version*, Eph.5:22-24)

Even so, the Church to which the monks have devoted their lives has traditionally been perceived as a she, and the clergy's relationship to "her" often referred to as a marriage.

She (the Church) is not only their wife, but also their superior since they have to abide by her rules and fulfil her demands. It seems like the very language used to communicate the nature of their holy life reflects the need of a stronger feminine power than what a patriarchal religion can offer. Therefore they have to turn to words from the secular sphere denoting what their vows deny them, namely; wife and marriage. Ideally, being married to the church and staying pure should satisfy Ambrosio. However, he succumbs to his own urges and temptations. He fears the attractions of lovely females who may even be as “lovely as ... Madona” (39). She is the only woman the church allows him to adore. Therefore, a picture of the virgin has “for two years been his increasing wonder and adoration” (39). It is obvious that Ambrosio’s sexuality is in conflict with his gendered role within the church. His role should be that of the powerful and superior “Father”, absolutely manly and gendered, but above sexual temptations. As a member of the clergy he must stay within the laws of his order and be an irreproachable moral example for everyman.

1.2 Worldly Influence and Vows of Celibacy

The setting of the first chapter is the Church of the Capuchin in Madrid. The church is described as “thronged with auditors,” (11) but the author makes it quite clear that most of them have come for other reasons than to listen to God’s words. The church is a meeting place where “women came to show themselves, the men to see the women” (11). The many statues of the church are described. There are statues of cherubims and saints which all symbolize the holiness of the place. Ambrosio is introduced as the noblest of the monks and the most perfect orator. He is there to mediate God’s will to the congregation, but the holy church is overcrowded with ordinary people with other motives than listening to his sermon. There are so many of them that “the boys suspended themselves upon the wings of the cherubims ... and St. Agatha found herself under the necessity of carrying double” (12). The

holiness of the place is thus invaded by the common crowd with their sinful thoughts and intentions. Society's gender roles are at display also inside the church, and contrary to the monk, the men and women of the congregation have not disavowed their sexuality, so the church is to them a suitable place for courtship. It is in this setting that the novel's characters are introduced to the readers, in a gathering place where the secular world encounters the holy church. While Ambrosio delivers his enchanting speech in which he warns the congregation about the worldly vices, and tries to teach them the pious life that the church considers "the narrow gate to Heaven" (*King James Version*, Matt 7: 13), his secular auditors listen in terror and delight, but at the same time they represent the outside world's sinful elements with temptation and moral danger to the monk. The pulpit of the church is said to be the holy man's first encounter with the world outside the monastery. Orphaned at an early age, he was brought to the monastery where he grew up and got his education. As an adult he had been admitted into the order of St. Francis and continued his monastic life. One of the novel's characters, Don Lorenzo, points out that it is easy for Ambrosio to have a character without reproach as long as he remains in the convent. He then goes on: "but now, when, obliged by the duties of his situation, he must enter occasionally into the world, and be thrown into the way of temptation, it is now that it behoves him to show the brilliance of his virtue" (22). As long as Ambrosio stays within the convent walls, he is secure in his role as a moral ideal to his congregation. However, in the novel he is also described as a man born with sexual desires like anyone else, and his vows of celibacy are put on serious trial in his encounters with "the fairest and noblest dames of Madrid" (39). His pure life-style is endangered by their presence.

Ambrosio fulfils all the traditional masculine ideal set by the society of his time. He has knowledge, a powerful position within the church, and is described as "uncommonly handsome", admired by women who will use no other confessor than Ambrosio (39).

A career within the church was highly respected at the time since men from the upper classes who did not live on an inherited fortune or made a military career usually joined the church. However, to live by the norms of the monastery and resist the temptations from the outside world eventually become impossible for Ambrosio. He fails to stay within the norms of his order whose rules also the secular society expects him to abide by. Ambrosio's high position within the church can only be kept as long as he is willing and able to refrain from his own congenital sexuality. It is his position that gives him the power and authority which are qualities associated with masculinity both within the church and in the world outside. Contrary to mighty men in the secular world, he will fall from his position if he gives in to his sexuality. Purity in sexual matters is a requirement within the Catholic Church for those who want to devote their lives fully to God. The discrepancy between the church's high ideals and recurring crimes committed by its clergy within this field is made a prominent theme in the novel as Ambrosio's temptation and final moral fall are elaborated and revealed.

1.3 The Protector of Norms and their Fulfilment

Every society has its codes for polite and acceptable behaviour, and usually these are different for men and women. There are also always some individuals who see themselves as the special guardians of these norms, and therefore do their utmost to watch over other persons' activities to make sure that they do not overstep the roles given to them.

In *The Monk* it is Donna Leonella who has been assigned this position. She is portrayed as a somewhat ridiculous elderly woman of low status being the unmarried daughter of a shoemaker. However, she is presented to the readers as the chaperone of her very beautiful niece, Antonia, whose dead father held a noble title. Thus, she is given status through her niece. Donna Leonella personifies the effects of the social norms she supports as she bustles her way through the crowd in order to find a seat in the church, and loudly

pronounces her opinions about the rudeness of men who disregard the accepted practice of giving up their seats for a woman (12). The roles pertaining to polite behaviour are clearly gendered, and she expects these principles to be guidelines for all the men and women present in the church. The frustration which Leonella expresses about men's lack of politeness creates embarrassment for those who are not able to carry out the expected task: "Hearing this appeal to their politeness pronounced in a female voice, they interrupted their conversation" (12). The fact that they are not able to live up to the role assigned to polite men, puts them to shame, even though Leonella is not a woman that they really respect. The way in which Leonella watches over the realization of society's norms is a gendered role traditionally reserved for old women. They should be the moral mentors of the younger generation and ensure that the accepted rules of correct behaviour of their time and class are preserved in the future. Using herself as an example, Leonella loudly proclaims how a female is supposed to behave when interacting with a man: "I am too well aware of the danger of such expeditions to trust myself in a young nobleman's power! No, no; I have as yet preserved my reputation without blemish or reproach, and I always knew how to keep the men at a proper distance" (17). According to Leonella, men are perceived as having the power to control women, and therefore a woman may be in danger of losing her innocence, which also means her reputation, if she is in too close contact with a man. In the setting of the novel nothing is more serious to a woman than losing her reputation. Only women assumed to be morally blameless are desirable as wives.

Other norms concerning the feminine role of the time are highlighted as Leonella guards her niece's manners: "Fye nice! How often have I told you, that you never should interrupt a person who is speaking! ... I shall never be able to make this girl any thing like a person of good breeding" (18). Since Antonia has already been displayed as the perfect innocent girl, this statement from her aunt seems superfluous to the reader and emphasizes the

fact that gender roles are taught to young women. They are not natural parts of their personalities. The roles of conduct which Leonella promotes are described as constructions with boundaries so narrow that not even a girl as innocent and angelic as Antonia can avoid transgressing them.

Antonia is Lewis's most tragic and heartbreaking female character. When she is introduced in the church in Madrid at the beginning of the novel she seems to be the almost perfect completion of feminine beauty and demeanour. She attracts the positive attention of the men around her, and Don Lorenzo is instantly infatuated with her. When she utters herself her voice has "a tone of unexampled sweetness" (12), and she is further depicted as so elegant and delicate in figure that men are curious to see her face. However, she is veiled, and thereby shielded from their intrusive glances. Her veil indicates modesty and decency, but it also reveals her inexperience. She has lived a shielded life together with her mother in a castle in Murcia. Madrid is new to her. Both Don Lorenzo and Leonella point out to her that it is the custom to be unveiled when in a church in Madrid. All the other women have put their veils aside. Leonella's intention is obviously to teach her niece what is customary, but Don Lorenzo's motive is to see her face. He is portrayed as a man looking for a suitable wife, and must find out if the young woman, who already has aroused such strong feelings in him, fulfils his (and his society's) requirements for this honourable position. When Antonia is finally persuaded to remove her veil her features are described as rather more "bewitching than beautiful." (14) "The several parts of her face considered separately, many of them were far from handsome; but when examined together, the whole was adorable. Her skin, though fair, was not entirely without freckles; her eyes were not very large, nor their lashes particularly long" (15). The minor flaws in Antonia's appearance seem to be necessary in order for the author to make her believable. Even the purest of all cannot be perfect. The freckles on her white skin may be charming, but are none the less, a deviation from the female

ideal of the time; which was a flawless whiteness of complexion. Big eyes and long lashes have also traditionally been looked upon as necessary for a woman to be considered a beauty, and the author lets us know about Antonia's shortcomings also in this respect. His criticism is, however, very gentle. He illustrates her small eyes and short lashes by using negatives together with positive adjectives. Instead of stating that her eyes are small, the phrase "not very large" is used, and her lashes are not particularly long. The picture we get is that a neutral observer of Antonia's features is able to find faults with her, but she is close enough to the female ideal to satisfy the man who has fallen in love even before seeing her face, so to Don Lorenzo Antonia "seems possessed of every quality requisite" to make him happy in a wife since she is "young, lovely, gentle [and] sensible" (25). The fact that his friend, Don Raymond, points out to him that the woman of his heart can impossibly be very sensible since "she said nothing but Yes and No" does not change his view (25).

1.4 The Power of Language and the Weakness of Silence

As the narrative depicts Antonia as almost unable to communicate, she is positioned in the role of a helpless female who cannot speak for herself: "Antonia, why do not you speak, child? While the cavalier says all sorts of civil things to you, you sit like a statue, and never utter a syllable of thanks, either bad, good, or indifferent!" (18). Her lack of language reflects her dependence upon others. She needs someone to talk for her and take care of her interests. However, it should also be noted that her silence may be a way of creating distance to strangers, and therefore used on purpose.

In contrast to the two cavaliers, Antonia is not given the advantage of language to position herself. As Lewis describes her as silent, the positioning of her person is left to those with language. She does not exhibit any gender-belonging in words; it is those around her that make her character out to be feminine. Silence seems to be considered a feminine trait. Judith

Butler's notion that gender is performative, can also be applied to language. She states that language too is a doing, because communication is a form of conduct (ES 72)¹. Language exposes and emphasizes gender roles and differences. Language can also be injurious both by the words with which one is addressed and by the mode of the address itself that interpellates and constitutes a subject (ES 2). Therefore language is powerful. Antonia's silence demonstrates that she is vulnerable. She cannot communicate or guard herself from linguistic injuries or effect injuries upon others. She is made dependent on the other characters' linguistic use and consideration in order not to be victimized, which is a role frequently associated with the feminine. In other words, language does emphasize gender relations, and those who have the power of words have the power to control and create social distinctions, and thus, also gender differences. Since communication requires a listener and a speaker, language is a construction which reflects a binary relationship. Gender roles are, as already said, also a binary construction, and it is possible to view the novel's male main character, Ambrosio, as the counterpart of Antonia since he is portrayed as being endowed with the power of words which again exposes his authoritative role.

Ambrosio's discourse positions him as superior to the people of his congregation as they are completely amazed and made inarticulate by his sermon: "though the monk had ceased to speak, enthusiastic silence still prevailed through the church" (21). The way they react to his discourse colours their perception of him as their superior. Also the fact that he is positioned on the pulpit, demonstrates his power over the congregation. Power here denotes the relationship between a subordinate group, the congregation, and a principal agent, the "man of holiness", who affects the former group. The power which is displayed in his language and people's reaction to it, demonstrate his masculinity. Power has traditionally

¹ Because there are references from two works by Judith Butler, the titles will be abbreviated to clarify which is quoted in the text. *Excitable Speech* is therefore abbreviated *ES*, and *Gender Trouble* will hereafter be denoted *GT*.

been associated with the gendered masculine role, and this is obviously also so in the society in which the story is set. Since a patriarchy is a “system of male authority”; Ambrosio’s role is that of a supervisor of the gender/patriarchal system because he has the power of language which is perceived as an index of patriarchal attitudes (Humm 113). Language is like the church, an institution. Language establishes relations between people. Ambrosio’s discourse focuses on the “beauties of religion” and “the vices of humanity and ... the punishment reserved for them in a future state” (20) and as a consequence, he becomes a judge of common people and their sinful lives. Thus, his language also creates distance between the congregation and the church. Since language both affects the audience and subverts their position, the values of the secular society become inferior to those of the church which are founded on the words of God as expressed in Ambrosio’s speech. Hence, the position of the church is strengthened, and the life-style it requires is commonly accepted as the ideal.

1.5 Morality Meets Pride

At the beginning of the novel, Lewis portrays Ambrosio as an admired “man of God”. However, already in the first chapter when the reader is presented with people’s praise of Ambrosio it is indicated that it is his high position that will cause his fall. Don Raymond’s thoughts about Ambrosio and his chastity function as a premonition:

His established reputation will mark him out to seduction as an illustrious victim; novelty will give additional charms to the allurements of pleasure; and even the talents with which nature has endowed him will contribute to his ruin, by facilitating the means of obtaining his object. (22)

This part of the text suggests that Ambrosio is liable to fall because he appears flawless in the eyes of people in general. The author warns about the fact that Ambrosio’s perfection in body

and mind might be a temptation both to himself and others. Thus, it is his congregation's idolization of him that exposes his weakness as a common man. The adoration which they communicate awakens feelings of superiority and narcissism in his mind which he for a long time manages to conceal from others: "He was no sooner alone, than he gave free to the indulgence of his vanity. When he remembered the enthusiasm which his discourse had excited, his heart swelled with rapture ... and pride told him loudly that he was superior to the rest of his fellow-creatures" (38). As the narrative displays that Ambrosio's feelings of supremacy are exposed whenever he is in solitude, it is made clear that he is well aware of the danger his vanity may cause to his authority, and thereby, to his position as superior to everyman. Vanity or pride is one of the seven cardinal sins of the Catholic Church, and therefore Ambrosio's self-adoration is in conflict with the ideals he is supposed to live by as a holy Father. Pride indicates arrogance wherein a man favours himself in his thought and silently utters his praises to himself (Lyman 136), and not to God. In his vanity he positions himself superior to God and his fellow creatures, and thus he is neither a part of society at large, nor a faithful member of the clerical society. Accordingly, Stanford Morris Lyman states that "pride alienates man from God, but it separates him from society as well. He departs from devotion to and the grace of God – and he exiles himself from the company of and cooperation with his fellow humans. He becomes the ever-flattering companion of himself (137). In other words, pride positions Ambrosio outside the reigning moral norms of both societies portrayed in the novel. His vanity is described as extreme when he says to himself that even "Religion cannot boast Ambrosio's equal" (39) Still, as long as he hides his vanity, his role within the clerical society is maintained. By revealing Ambrosio's high thoughts of himself at this point in the novel the author prepares the ground for the transformation of the monk that will follow.

1.6 The Dangerous Sound of “Woman” – The Feminine Association

The religious mask of Ambrosio is not only challenged by his own pride, but also by a young novice, Rosario, who prepares for the life within the convent walls. He becomes the most serious threat to all that the novel’s main character has achieved in his role as a mighty and morally irreproachable member of his holy order.

The novel displays Rosario as a hermit who has entered the convent in order to escape society which he detests (40). Since no one knows who he is or where he is from, there is something mysterious about him. Rosario is portrayed as strongly emotionally attached to Ambrosio. The description of the two characters’ relationship might be interpreted to indicate a romantic attraction between the young novice and his mentor: “In the abbot’s society his heart seemed to be at ease ... Ambrosio on his side did not feel less attracted towards the youth ... 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” (41). The narrative fashions the role of Rosario with feminine elements by letting him decorate Ambrosio’s cell with flowers and referring to his voice as sweet (41). Even the name, Rosario, is androgynous and therefore ambiguous regarding gender. The character, Rosario, who always lets his cowl hide his face is not necessarily a man. The glimpses that anyone accidentally gets of his features reveal that he is beautiful. The fact that he is portrayed as an “object of interest and curiosity” to the other monks shows that there is something about him which is at odds with the other residents of the convent (40). The introduction of the cloaked Rosario is very similar to that of the veiled Antonia in the church. They both attract other people’s attention by shading themselves from being seen. The description of the young Rosario therefore calls the femininity of Antonia to the reader’s mind, and thus awakens the suspicion about the true nature of Rosario’s gender. The monks’ reaction to him may also be a sign of the complexity of his character which later comes to light as he reveals his true identity as Matilda Villanega, a young woman from a

distinguished family. When Rosario exposes his secret to Ambrosio the latter's virtuous role is put to a test. In order not to jeopardize his powerful position within the church, the monk ought to banish the young woman precipitately, and it is also said in the text that this is his intention at first. However, even though Matilda has revealed her gender, she is still covered. Her features are unknown as her garment hides her feminine appearance. Only in words, through language, has Matilda been exposed. Clearly, her words are enough to change her role in Ambrosio's eyes, and Rosario Matilda realizes that this is so, even before his/her words are uttered: "Oh! How I tremble to name the word! ... I am a woman!" (54). As soon as the secret is revealed, when the word woman has been pronounced, a distance is created between Ambrosio and Rosario. Ambrosio at once decides on Matilda's departure from the convent. In vain she strives to convince him that she should stay, and that she is not a threat to his purity. However, even though language is powerful, it cannot erase the difference which has been created by Rosario's words. They have erected a barrier between him and Ambrosio which reflects the gendered norms of the feminine and the masculine.

Because language reflects the power structures of society, the word woman is often associated with words which denote weakness, ignorance and subordination, while the opposite is true for the word man. Lewis shows that these associations are also alive in Ambrosio's mind when he lets the monk express his thoughts to Matilda about her womanly reactions: "insensibly, your passions will gain a superiority over your reason; and, far from being repressed by my presence, every moment which we pass together will only serve to irritate and excite them (58). Even though he fears her sexuality, he also fears her gendered femininity, her otherness with which he is not familiar. To him, her femininity seems uncontrollable and dangerous. Rosario was accepted, Matilda, who is identical with Rosario, is not. She realizes that the only way she can have a life within the convent walls is if she refrains from her femininity. Therefore she states: "Forget that I am a woman!" (58). She

desperately tries to erase her gendered role: “consider me only as a friend” (58). She seeks to be genderless. However, language has already positioned her in the role of a woman, since “women must translate their own ways of understanding into the terms of the male worldview” (Littlejohn 225). This worldview creates the duplicity which makes it impossible to create a new and neutral role that belongs neither to the feminine nor the masculine. Her role as the feminine has been established by language, and likewise, Ambrosio’s masculinity is confirmed by his own speech which reflects his power over her: “You have heard my decision, and it must be obeyed” (59).

Matilda’s pleading does not change Ambrosio’s mind because it only emphasizes the difference between them, and thus also draws attention to the gendered norms of the convent which Ambrosio is supposed to live by. Matilda’s otherness establishes a binary relationship between the monk, who is also a man, and the woman. Gender and sex are, as argued before, different, but the two aspects are also linked, and since the members of the clergy have vowed to refrain from sex, separate lives for the two genders makes it easier to avoid sexual sins and stay pure for God. In the novel this is of importance when Matilda endeavours to convince Ambrosio that she is not a menace to his holy union with the church: “Think not, Ambrosio, that I come to rob your bride of your affections” (55). Once again we see that the life the monks live within the church is seen as a binary relationship of man and God, equivalent to that of husband and wife, and Matilda promises not to let her gender be a hindrance for Ambrosio’s alliance with God which makes him transgress the traditional gender roles with their sexual links. The holy marriage is the origin of his high position, and therefore also of the general admiration that he enjoys. It is fear of losing all this which concerns him regarding Matilda’s presence. However, she ensures him that she loves him for his virtues and not as an ordinary man: “lose them [his virtues], and with them you lose my affections. I look upon you as a saint: prove to me that you are no more than a man, and I quit you with disgust” (58). She

beseeches him to believe that their goal is the same, namely to live a pure life in obedience to God and be a moral example to the outside world. So far in the novel Ambrosio has been portrayed as “perfectly without reproach” and “an exception to mankind in general” (23), and Matilda urgently prevails upon him that her presence in the convent will not change his role. The illusion of moral perfection is preserved, but it is obvious that the presence of a female among the monks, no matter how virtuously she has vowed to live, is a menace to their holy marriage and also to the convent’s reputation.

At first sight it seems like it is Matilda’s insistence on her admiration of Ambrosio’s virtues that persuades him not to banish her. However, the author discloses to the readers what is his real, though perhaps unconscious motive:

He perceived not that his vanity was flattered by the praises bestowed upon his eloquence and virtue; that he felt a secret pleasure in reflecting that a young and seemingly lovely woman had for his sake abandoned the world and sacrificed every other passion to that which he had inspired: still less did he perceive, that his heart throbbed with desire (57).

His natural and innate sexuality which he has sacrificed for God is aroused by the woman in front of him, a female who has also been his close male friend. This confusing situation blurs the accepted gender roles. The disclosure of Rosario as Matilda results in an unmasking of Ambrosio’s too. Even so, his religious role is not completely broken down until the features of Matilda are revealed to him; she is identical to the holy Madonna before whom Ambrosio has kneeled and about whom he has fantasized: “what was his amazement at beholding the exact resemblance of his admired Madonna! The same exquisite proportion of features, the same profusion of golden hair, the same rosy lips, heavenly eyes, and majesty of countenance adorned Matilda!” (73). She is the picture perfect of the ideal, innocent woman whose painting Ambrosio has on the wall of his cell. Since the holy Madonna is the only female “present” in the convent, worshiped as the virgin mother, she is the ideal woman to the virgin

monk. Her virginity is a sign of purity and because the monks strive to be pure, she is the only woman whom they can openly adore. Ambrosio's fantasies and dreams about the Madonna come true as Matilda reveals her features. Since she resembles the Holy Madonna, the latter's divine qualities are transferred onto Matilda who then changes her role from a dangerous temptress to a divine being whom Ambrosio cannot resist because it is "not to the woman, but to the divinity that he kneels" (73). He does not respect her femaleness, but he respects the divinity which he imagines in her.

The transformation of Rosario into Matilda makes a mockery of the monks' effort to be above gender since the feminine gendering of Matilda takes place within the convent walls. Rosario's time as a novice which was intended to distance him from life in the outside world where gender and sex are closely linked, has turned him into Matilda, who is absolutely a woman, but who is not necessarily feminine. The fact that she has control over Ambrosio indicates the opposite.

The revelation of Matilda and Ambrosio's subsequent fall represent a turning point in the novel. Ambrosio, who has so far been portrayed as a pious monk metamorphoses into a man affected by his masculinity and driven by his sexuality. From now on we are presented to Gothic gender roles which commonly present the male as a villain in search for an innocent creature to destroy. The stereotypical characteristics of the Gothic create expectations about Ambrosio's fate. He has become a type, and we will see that his character does not develop further. It is only his role as a villain which is exposed as it becomes constantly more apparent throughout the story. His role at the opening of the novel as the devout monk who also has to fight moral struggles is left behind. Lewis now presents us to the imprudent and unscrupulous Ambrosio who stops at nothing to get his urges satisfied. He appears as completely destructive both to himself and others. However, this frightening change in Ambrosio is not described as created by his own will. He is driven by supernatural dark forces which work

through Matilda (Rosario). The divine ideals of the Catholic Church, which are frequently referred to at the beginning of the novel, are entirely overturned by the negative side of religion; the Devil and his associates. References to Biblical episodes indicate the destructive force of the female gender which has both been blamed for man's fall from Eden and been linked to witchcraft. Matilda takes the role of Eve, the temptress and destroyer, in order to break down Ambrosio's pious character. The fall from Paradise is re-enacted as Matilda offers Ambrosio a rose, just like Eve at the beginning of time tempted Adam to eat the forbidden apple. Ambrosio's acceptance of the rose results in a deadly snake bite (64). Matilda is positioned in the long-established role of the dangerous female, a seducer destructive to man and in league with the Devil. As a woman she is weak and easily becomes the victim of the Devil's lure and power. She is his tool which he can use in order to dominate man and doom him to eternal pain. This stereotypical role of the female is emphasized in the *Malleus Maleficarum*^[1], the treatise on witches used by the Catholic Church in their hunt for witches in the Early Modern Period, from 1450 to 1750 (Levack 1). It argues that the female's soul is more prone to being influenced by the Devil than that of a man, and most witches are therefore women. According to the *Malleus Maleficarum*, witchcraft is the ultimate sin as "the work of witches exceed all other sins, in hideousness since they deny Him crucified, in inclination, since they commit nastiness of the flesh with devils, in blindness of mind since in a pure spirit of malignity they rage and bring every injury upon the souls and bodies of men and beasts" (Institoris 75). This view strengthens the dogma of woman's subordination to man and positions her as the Devil's destructive agent, and thus a danger to man.

This picture is reflected in the character of Matilda who is depicted as the seducer and polluter of Ambrosio's virtue. However, as Ambrosio is lured into her trap and is bitten by the snake, she is able to re-establish her position as his companion by saving him from a certain death by extracting the venom from his wound. Hence, her role is changed from evil

temptress to saintly saviour. She willingly endangers her own life in order to save his which for a while assigns her a messianic-like role. She might try to mirror Madonna both in appearance and soul, but when Ambrosio thinks of her he cannot avoid seeing her as a sexual temptation: "He thought upon Matilda's beauty and affection; upon the pleasures which he might have shared with her, had he not been restrained by monastic fetters" (77). His purity is threatened by the female, the Devil's servant.

1.7 The Blank Page

Don Raymond's story is a story within the novel. It is a first person narrative, and thus it seems to be a subjective description seen through the narrator's eyes. However, as he introduces himself in the story, he conceals his true identity and rank. He deliberately takes on the role of someone else than himself. The reason for his camouflage is claimed to be his exalted birth which does not permit him to mix with the lower classes (86). He chooses to impersonate the commoner, Alphonso d'Alvarada. At the beginning, little is revealed of Don Raymond's assumed role, probably because the part he plays is not his true nature, and thus it is challenging for him to convey something which he is unacquainted with. Still, the way in which he portrays himself in his faked role exposes his idea of the regular man. The character he has chosen to impersonate is a commoner whom he endows with a certain amount of naiveté. Consequently, he is easily fooled by bandits and would probably have been killed if a brave woman did not come to his aid. It is Marguerite, the apparently hostile wife of one of the bandits, who eventually turns into the heroine of this story. As a warning of danger, she spreads blood stained sheets on her visitor's bed. Marguerite has, just like Don Raymond, played a role to hide her true self. Her motive has been the safety of her children, and her role that of the obedient wife. However, Marguerite's strength and independence are shown when she awakens Don Raymond d'Alvara from his gullibility.

When Marguerite is no longer observed by the bandits, she lets her disguise fall and acts according to her own heart. Since she completely changes her character from one moment to another, Raymond narrates his strong reaction to her change of character and is almost frightened by her. She does no longer fit into the role in which he had placed her. As she changes, his own performance is in danger because he is not able to stay calm in the role of his character. When Marguerite is portrayed in the position of holding his arm, it seems like she has managed to get hold of his acted role and presses forth his true and sceptical nature.

Marguerite seized the moment when we were unobserved: she caught my hand, and pressed it strongly. ‘Look at the sheets!’ said she as she passed me, and immediately resumed her former occupation. Startled by the abruptness of her action, I remained as if petrified. Robert’s voice desiring me to follow him recalled me to myself. ... You may be certain, that the moment when I found myself alone, was that on which I complied with Marguerite’s injunction. I took the candle, hastily approached the bed, and turned down the coverture. What was my astonishment, my horror, at finding the sheets crimsoned with blood! (95)

In *The Character in Veil: Imagery of the Surface in the Gothic Novel*, Eve Sedgwick promotes the idea that the bloody sheets which Marguerite lays out represent a “distinct and comparable past (what happened to the last guest) and the present/future (what will happen to this one)” (259). The metonymic spread creates a discontinuity between an episode completed and one in construction which will result in the change of roles (259). Displaying a bride’s bloody sheets on the morning of her wedding night to prove her virginity, has been a tradition in many societies. Thus, Marguerite’s display of bloody sheets to Raymond; is in addition to being a warning, a strong female symbol. Bloody sheets indicate that innocence is lost. In this case it might be seen as the experienced woman’s warning of mortal danger to the innocent

man. She knows about the vices of the world while he is in ignorance of what threatens. What might become Don Raymond's fate is exposed through the sheets. They also function as an awakening. He can no longer play the role of the naïve man. His masculinity is in peril, since falling victim to another man's shrewd evil and physical power will effeminate him. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that the "snowy whiteness" symbolizes purity (616). The whiteness is like a "blank page that asks to be written on" and thus, the white sheets on Raymond's bed are a picture of his purity which "hints tantalizingly at ... female vulnerability" (616). The sheets reflect his effeminate role because it is his sheets that are tainted with blood, while according to custom it is a woman who should find herself in this position. Since the gothic conventions normally position the female in the role of the sufferer of the craze of a male tyrant, Don Raymond's masculinity is questioned as he is placed within the traditional female role.

1.8 The Whiteness of the Veil and the Darkness of Complexion

The novel's role of victimized female is first and foremost performed by the young Antonia. She is presented as the picture of innocence, but nonetheless, the author has drawn her character with a slight element of temptress. This is seen from the males' reaction to her appearance of "whiteness" and "delicacy" (13). Her dress is white and so is her neck which has become visible from behind the veil. This whiteness symbolizes her virginity and innocence, and it is this whiteness which draws the attention of the young men. She becomes an object of temptation as her purity is reflected in her white dress which, according to Gilbert and Gubar, "implies that she exists only and completely for the man who will remove it" (616). Since her appearance expels innocence, her mind emerges as ignorant since innocence is also a sign of lacking knowledge. The purity of the outside reflects the uncontaminated mind within: "Tis a young creature ... who is totally ignorant of the world" (15). The way in

which she is portrayed is similar to that of Ambrosio's characteristic as he too is sexually ignorant (19). The fact that the prominent monk resembles a female in regard to knowledge of sexual matters, positions him within the boundaries of innocence associated with the feminine. Still, as he is a monk, purity is expected of him, and his authoritative role is strengthened by his virtues. Antonia's ironic remark about the fact that she and Ambrosio share the quality of inexperience illustrates their difference in status: "Does that make a saint? ... Bless me! Then am I one" (19). By putting these words into Antonia's mouth the author highlights the fact that the norms by which an unmarried female is supposed to abide are very similar to those of a monk, but she does not in any respect share the latter's status.

In appearance Ambrosio and Antonia are described as contrasts. Antonia's whiteness reflects her ignorance, whereas Ambrosio's appearance expels authority/ power as he is presented as a "man of noble port and commanding presence" (20). The way in which he is depicted emphasizes his role as a man who requires and gets respect:

His stature was lofty, and his features uncommonly handsome. His nose was aquiline, his eyes large, black and sparkling, and his dark brows almost joined together. His complexion was of a deep but clear brown; study and watching had entirely deprived his cheek of colour. Tranquility reigned upon his smooth unwrinkled forehead; and content, expressed upon every feature, seemed to announce the man equally unacquainted with cares and crimes ... Still there was a certain severity in his look and manner that inspired universal awe, and few could sustain the glance of his eye, at once fiery and penetrating (20).

Contrary to Antonia's whiteness, the colours which represent Ambrosio are dark; his eyes are black, his complexion deep brown. His appearance reflects knowledge and a deeper understanding of life. The fact that his cheeks lack colour creates associations of lifelessness, and his brown complexion reflects spiritual death (Ferguson 151). Monastic life means an ascetic existence inside the walls of the convent. Since the monks have to renounce the delights and sorrows of common people, they seem lifeless to everyman. Ambrosio does not

participate in life outside the convent, and is not affected by it. Consequently, his features show no trace of a lived life, and he is portrayed as unwrinkled and smooth. Still, his fiery and penetrating eyes bear witness of intelligence and shrewdness. He can see right through people, and his glance makes them feel uneasy so that they cannot look him in the eyes. The portrayal of his features positions him superior to others as his appearance exhibits knowledge “study and watching had entirely deprived his cheek of colour,” and his actions illustrate his domination over the congregation as “his look and manner ... inspired universal awe” (20). Hence, Ambrosio’s dark looks are intimidating. Darkness possesses a quality of endlessness. Nobody knows what it hides, where it ends, or what is on the other side of it. Ambrosio’s darkness hints that there is something hidden behind it. This indicates unexpected depths in his personality. The purity by which he is characterized at first is not necessarily the only aspect of his soul; after all, darkness is also associated with evil. Another aspect of Ambrosio’s character is that his very role as a monk may function as a veil to hide his true personality. Peter Brooks argues in *Virtue and Terror: The Monk*, that recognition of the Holy means a feeling of dependence, a sense that one is covered by the numinous, the divine (251). In his role as a monk Ambrosio is covered by the divine in the form of the Church as it is God’s institution on earth. That is what allows him to be part of the numinous which he does not respect, but whose vengeance he apprehends (Brooks 251). Just like Antonia’s veil is supposed to hide her appearance, but indicates the tempting whiteness of her skin, Ambrosio’s monastic role is worn as his moral veil through which his ominous darkness shines. Consequently, the veils of both these characters function as indicators rather than covers.

Another character who is portrayed as covered is the bleeding nun. She is not a living human being, but a ghost. Like Antonia, she is draped in a white veil which would normally be seen as a symbol of virginity. In this case, however, there are ugly stains of blood upon her white dress. Just like the bloody sheets, the bloodstained veil carries the symbolic

connotations of both innocence and violence. The female apparition represents a fallen woman who is punished for her sins in her afterlife. She has lived a licentious life despite being a nun, and her moral corruption has turned her into a murderess. Her bloody veil indicates contamination. In The Bible women who bleed (menstruate) are described as impure and are therefore untouchable for a period of seven days (*King James Version*, Lev. 15:19-32). Bleeding is part of the female's nature. She bleeds when she is sexually mature, and she bleeds when she loses her virginity. Traditionally, both these conditions have been related to impurity in patriarchal societies. Brooks claims that nature is a source of despair for in it we "ultimately discover ... our own death and decomposition" which images "the impossibility of the existence of purity" (216). A woman's purity and innocence will be destroyed by her natural physical development. It is in human nature to desire, and desire leads to loss of innocence (216). The feminine gendered norms reflected in the novel are based on the importance of purity of body and mind, but they also appear to be doomed to destruction by human desire. Therefore the Bleeding Nun is a picture of the futility of the norms both inside and outside the convent. Her stained veil reveals more than it covers. It hides her features, but it exposes her moral corruption.

The Bleeding Nun is at first mistakenly identified as Agnes, a young woman who has fallen in love with Don Raymond and therefore plans to avoid taking the veil by eloping, disguised as the famous apparition. This plan is overturned as the Bleeding Nun succeeds in taking Agnes's role, and is driven off in Don Raymond's carriage. In this part of the novel Agnes is depicted as a woman who is willing to fight for her freedom. To do so, she must disregard every feminine norm of obedience and propriety. She appears strong and intelligent as she designs an apparently ingenious plan of escape (130). However, her readiness to overstep the boundaries set for female behaviour also indicates affinity between her life and

that of the Bleeding Nun whose tragic fate might indicate that a severe punishment also awaits Agnes.

Don Raymond's disgust when he discovers with whom he has eloped (140), mirrors society's response to a fallen woman, because the Bleeding Nun is also a representative of that female fate. Dean and Juliet Maccannell call attention to this mirror-effect in *The Beauty System*, by maintaining that when a woman "looks into the mirror and sees ugliness reflected back upon herself, what she is actually experiencing is the value that her society has placed upon her category, that she has no value" (214).

1.9 Writing on a Blank Page – The Impure Female

The Bleeding Nun may also be seen as a product of Agnes and Raymond's love (Brooks 256). Her appearance is a premonition of the outcome of their love which results in Agnes's violation of both society and the convent's norms as she yields to her desire after having taken the veil. Then she ignores every rule concerning female purity, since she is not only an unmarried woman, but also a nun, two female roles which in the novel's universe clearly require virginity. Raymond's position changes into a molester when Agnes's innocence is demolished within the convent's walls. Nevertheless, for some time she manages to conceal her moral transgression. Eventually, the author lets a letter, a page of writing, reveal her impropriety. Since writing on a blank page carries the same symbolism as bloody stains upon white sheets, it emphasizes the fact that her purity is spoiled, her blank page has been written on. She is morally tainted and disgraced, and in the eyes the prioress, her superior in the convent, deserves no mercy.

The author effectively emphasizes the double standard of the Church, by describing how the prioress threatens Agnes with eternal perdition and thus places herself in the role of the God as the judge of a human sinner. The Catholic Church preaches God's mercy, but his

agents on earth are portrayed as merciless. The way in which the Prioress practices her superior positions her in the role of a devilish woman ready to destroy those who fail.

Agnes's pregnancy is not only an evidence of her moral impurity, it is a reminder of the female's role outside the convent walls. The nuns who have embraced the norms of chastity will never experience motherhood, but they are considered morally superior to other women. Agnes with her growing abdomen may be seen as a token of disrespect of the convent's strict moral rules and a reminder of the sinful, secular society. Agnes's situation illustrates the negative view of the female body often associated with Christianity. Her pregnancy draws attention to her impure female body and positions her as a womb whose main function is to satisfy a man's lust and bring his offspring into the world. Even the Bible teaches that childbearing makes a woman unclean, and if she gives birth to a daughter she is unclean for twice as long as if she gives birth to a son (*King James Version*, Lev. 12:1-8). Thus, we see that femaleness has a long tradition of being considered a more unclean category than maleness within Christianity. The body functions which men cannot perform which are claimed to make her most impure.

1.10 The Mother's Convent and the Preservation of the Feminine Ideal

In the context of the novel neither society nor the Church grants high positions to women.

Even so, many of the female characters are portrayed as striving to get power over someone else. Elivra, Antonia's dominating mother, struggles to keep her daughter morally flawless, and therefore she keeps Antonia practically imprisoned within the safety of her own house.

Antonia's naïve ignorance is consciously preserved by Elvira by isolating her from the influences of the outside world. She does this to make her daughter a perfect fulfilment of the female ideal of the time. The rules Antonia has to abide by in her mother's house are just as narrow as those of a monastic life. She has not taken the veil, but celibacy is of paramount

importance to her honour as long as she is unmarried. It is also important to attract the right sort of husband. Elvira knows this, and having no riches to confer to her daughter, all she can do to secure her future is to endow her with irreproachable virtues. She goes to such extreme lengths to reach this goal that she even rewrites the Bible to make it suitable for Antonia's tender mind. Anything that might give her unwanted knowledge is erased. We see that Ambrosio, who at this point in the novel is described as a moral ideal himself, is very satisfied with Elvira's diligence in her moral guidance of her daughter:

He examined the book she had been reading, and had now placed upon the table. It was the Bible.' How!' said the friar to himself, 'Antonia reads the Bible, and is still so ignorant?' But, upon a further inspection, he found that Elvira had made exactly the same remark. That prudent mother, while she admitted the beauties of the sacred writings, was convinced that, unrestricted, no reading more improper could be permitted a young woman. Many of the narratives can only tend to excite ideas the worst calculated for a female breast ... She had in consequence made two resolutions respecting the Bible. The first was of an age to feel its beauties, and profit by its morality. The second, that it should be copied out with her own hand, and all improper passages either altered or omitted ... and such was the Bible which Antonia was the Bible which Antonia was reading (223).

In the setting of the novel ignorance is a female virtue. Antonia is isolated from the realities of life, and any knowledge that might pollute her mind is kept from her. Just like monks and nuns are separated from the world and build their character from the inside of a convent, Antonia is isolated in her home, and artificial social principles are her moral guidelines. However, Peter Brooks states that purity is not perpetual it will be destroyed by nature (260). Antonia's purity is unnatural and can only lead to disaster. Antonia's mother has carefully inflicted the reigning female ideals on her daughter and made her an ignorant and helpless creature who mirrors the ideal woman of her time. She is a construction of the gendered norms of society which require that women perform a role that is unnatural to them.

1.11 The Powerful Fathers and the Weak Woman

The Catholic Church has powerful position in the society which the novel describes. This fact is especially discernible in the portrayal of Ambrosio as long as he is still his order's most brilliant representative. During his highly admired discourses in the Church he promotes a life style completely devoted to his creator, God, whilst he denounces the secular life style as destructive and sinful: "His [Ambrosio's] description of the Devil, God bless us! Almost terrified me out of my wits, and when he spoke about sinners he seemed as if he was ready to eat them" (23). This is the way in which everyman reacts to Ambrosio's perception of what awaits sinners. Because of Ambrosio's high position, it is difficult not to take for granted that his views are understood by his listeners to be in accordance with the teaching of the church. Threats of eternal torments seem to function as an effective way of controlling common people. Ambrosio's discourses demonstrate the methods used to confirm and strengthen the authority of the church. It seems like the church's power strategy is in accordance with the masculine gender role of society in general, where the father is the great patriarch with the power to punish, and whose words are the law of his family.

Since God is almighty, and also referred to as the Father (not the Mother), he is perceived as masculine. This positions the masculine in general in a superior role since feminine qualities are not associated with God. The role of the father is reminiscent of God, and therefore authoritarian. In the novel Agnes fears God's power and his punishment: "But from the anger of God, oh Raymond! Who shall shield me?" (164). Not only is she afraid of God's vengeance, but fears her biological father's wrath equally much: "I love my father: he has treated me harshly ... were I to quit the convent, he never would forgive me" (160). We see that she relates to two fathers, and still there is one more father figure that needs to be taken into account. That is Ambrosio who serves as the link between God as Holy Father and the secular world. The power with which he is portrayed gives him authority to guide the

outside world in the direction of God's wishes, and he has the power to control Agnes's destiny too since he, as a monk and priest, is above the nuns. The control which he has creates the same fear in Agnes as she experiences in relation to the two other patriarchs in her life. She pleads for mercy for her disgrace and sin which Ambrosio has discovered after reading a letter addressed to Agnes written by her lover: "Father, compassionate my youth! Look with indulgence on a woman's weakness, and deign to conceal my frailty!" (44). This portrayal of her despair emphasizes the fact that all of her fathers have the power and the right to control her actions and to judge her. In relation to God, Ambrosio, and her father Agnes is depicted as weak. She has no possibility to shield herself from the vengeance which is enforced on her. She must be punished because her fathers have lost their command of her purity. Her role as a female is to keep within the boundaries set by her fathers. The subordination of the female is enhanced and contrasted with the strong masculinity associated with both God and father. It is also apparent that the church endorses the reigning gendered roles of the secular society. Power is reserved for the masculine also within the sacred world. Consequently, the gendered norms of society are strengthened by a religion which promotes a masculine God and a church which in itself is a patriarchal society.

1.12 Architecture – Construction of Perfection

The architecture of gothic churches reflects the patriarchal hierarchy supported by Christianity. The church which is portrayed in the novel has tall pillars and columns which indicate powerful greatness. The church is a place of worship close to a masculine God, and its construction creates a sense of awe and dominating peace: "A soft and cooling air breathed along the solitary aisles; the moon-beams darting into the church through painted windows, tinged the fretted roofs and massy pillars with a thousand various shades of light and colours. Universal silence prevailed around, only interrupted by the occasional closing of doors in the

adjoining abbey” (27). The columns and towers reach towards heaven and symbolize mankind’s search for perfection of which God is a picture. The church is the house of God (Ferguson 163), the house of the Father, the society’s main patriarch, and to highlight God and Christianity’s powerful position in the secular society, Christian architects have designed the church “to dominate all distant perspectives of the town, and to surge toward heaven, conveying a commanding message about the Christian God and his economic importance” (Bratton 117). The father, the patriarch, is reflected in the church’s construction. It creates an illusion of perfection from the outside, but its dominating construction may hide its stains and secrets “lurking behind the Mask of Virtue” (75). In the novel the tall columns conceal those who do not want to be seen. Don Lorenzo spies on a mysterious man who hides a letter behind a statue: “The shadow thrown by the column effectually concealed him [Lorenzo] from the stranger,” and the statues hide the men curious to see the pretty nuns uncover their features upon removing their veils (29). The church’s special architecture makes it the scene of clandestine activity. It is not only a sanctuary where God’s word is preached. It is a place where plots are planned and temptation is planted in men’s hearts. The pillars and columns of the church are symbols of heavenly power and glory since they both support and adorn the building, but their shadows may function as refuges for those who serve someone else than God. The metaphorical characterization of Ambrosio as “the uncorrupted pillar of the church” emphasizes this (39). As long as he resides on his pulpit he seems to strengthen the church’s position among the members of his admiring congregation. His greatness is visible, but the wicked sides of his personality are concealed. Don Lorenzo is described as “leaning against the seventh column from the pulpit” both when he meets Antonia for the first time (12) and when he secretly watches the concealment of Agnes’s letter behind the statue of St Francis (26). The number seven is in biblical sense said to symbolize completeness or perfection since the Bible starts by God’s seven-day-long creation and ends with the seven Seals of the

Revelation. The author thus indicates that the position by the seventh column is important. It is said to be in “the very body of the church at no great distance from the pulpit” (12). It is here Antonia’s tragic story starts. Here she sees Ambrosio, and is also seen by him, for the first time, and it is here Agnes’s real trial starts since the letter that is meant to save her is revealed and causes her doom. Thus, the safety associated with the church is portrayed as an illusion. The patriarchal church with its male dominance does not offer protection to weak and helpless women. Whether they are pure of heart like Antonia or if they have sinned like Agnes, they are in danger of falling preys to evil lurking in the shadows of the pillars and in human hearts.

Chapter II

Character Transformation

Gothic literature traditionally makes use of character types. These are flat, one-dimensional characters that are constructed on the principle of one idea or quality (Forster 65). They do not undergo any development as the narrative evolves, but they represent binary categories of good and evil. Lewis constructs a binary tension in the novel as he provides it with settings consisting of two societies: the clerical and the outside world. The church is a place of virtue and morality, while potential sin and immorality reside in the secular world. The church is the ideal society which sets the standard with its assumed piety and denial of worldly pleasures. Its representatives appear to be saints on earth, although the novel discloses that they are as imperfect and weak as all human beings. In order to illustrate that the representatives of the church are governed by temptations and hunger for power, Lewis provides them with a mask of moral perfection, which conceals their true nature. The mask of these so-called virtuous characters highlights the apparently immorality of ordinary people, and eventually reverses the tension between good and evil. Thus what appears to be character transformation when the mask falls is in fact a character quality that has been there from the start although carefully disguised. The masks of the characters are not only based on the sacral/secular binary, but also on the notions of gender and class, and character performances are conditioned accordingly. The binary, either/or principle on which the gothic novel bases its characterization is thus upheld but reversed in the end when character status and power relations are unmasked.

2.1 The Effect of Sexuality and Vanity

In the first part of the novel Rosario is revealed to be a woman, Matilda. She uses her femaleness to control Ambrosio. Her suicide threat is an example of this. It is not forceful enough just to point a dagger at her heart, so she exposes her breast before doing so. Thus, she takes advantage of a part of her body closely connected to female sexuality and therefore most

tempting to men. It seems that the author wants to underline the fact that this is not an innocent woman in despair, but rather a person who has closely calculated the effects of her actions. We also see that her dramatic exhibition creates new and unknown feelings in Ambrosio. He seems to be more affected by the beauty of her breast than by her threat to kill herself:

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-beans 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 (60).

Ambrosio's sexual feelings are aroused by Matilda's naked breast. She becomes an object pleasurable to his eye at the same time as Ambrosio becomes a man affected by sexual lusts which are forbidden to him. It is obvious that he is overwhelmed by Matilda's body as he is struck by unknown sensations, and experiences both concern and pleasure. His ambivalent feelings are created by the tension between his monastic role and his male desire. Ambrosio's high ideals are challenged by Matilda's exposure of her breast. Despite the effect the female sex has on him, Ambrosio tries to convince himself that he will manage to "forget her sex" (61). Due to his long-established self-adoration and his belief in his own moral perfection he has so far perceived himself to be "superior to the rest of his fellow creatures" and therefore able to resist such a worldly matter as sexuality (38).

However, as he gives in to Matilda's demand and permits her to remain in the monastery he is aware of the danger he is in: "Hold! He cried in an hurried, faltering voice; I can resist no longer! Stay then enchantress! Stay for my destruction!"(60) Even so, Ambrosio's public role as "man of God" is not endangered by Matilda's presence as long as it

is kept secret. He can reside in his supreme position as an irreproachable monk devoted to God's will. However, since the monk is depicted as infatuated with his role as the "ideal of Madrid," his character is taunted by the pursuit of power and the longing for admiration already before his involvement with Matilda. It is pride which reveals his character's shortcomings and shows the ordinary man behind his monastic mask. His ego is fortified when Matilda expresses her devotion to him, and her words strengthen his pride: "he could not avoid being flattered by Matilda's declaration" (60). This illustrates that he is on the verge of abandoning his vows.

2.2 The Divine Sublime and the Double

Already before Ambrosio has seen Matilda's face he confuses her with the Holy Madonna in his dreams. It is her divinity which he urges to experience. However, his confusion of Madonna's divinity and Matilda's sexuality illustrates the workings of the uncanny. In Ambrosio's dreams the difference between Matilda and the Madonna is blurred, and thus the heavenly is combined with the earthly: "Matilda stood before him in his dreams, and his eyes again dwelt upon her naked breast ... Sometimes his dreams presented the image of his favourite Madona ... [who] embraced him affectionately, and his senses were unable to support delight so exquisite" (61). When Matilda's appearance is finally revealed, it creates total confusion in Ambrosio's mind because it is his former friend, Rosario, who has turned into this sexually attractive woman whose features are identical with those of the Madonna. Thus, Madonna's divinity and Matilda's sexuality seem united in the same being. Because Matilda has been the model for the picture which Ambrosio worships, she is perceived as the Holy Madonna's double, or vice versa. It is this psychological phenomenon which Sigmund Freud in *The Uncanny* refers to as an "unheimlich" element. The effect of the double creates a feeling of the uncanny: "we have characters that are to be considered identical because they

look alike” (141). The double looks familiar, but since it is not the same person, it is still unfamiliar. This is why Matilda seems familiar to Ambrosio, and why he perceives her as a divine creature because she is Madonna’s replica. However, since she is not the Holy Madonna, she is also unfamiliar. It is this uncertain and frightening feeling of something familiar which has become unfamiliar that causes Ambrosio to be affected by his own sexual desires. Religion, which requires him to renounce his sexuality in order to stay pure, also contributes to awakening his sexuality, since it is his intense feelings for the Holy Madonna which are transferred to Matilda. The picture of the Holy Madonna has become a substitute for a woman of flesh and blood. His sexual desires and his religious veneration have been joined in a strong emotional experience connected to his beloved picture:

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! ... It is not the woman’s beauty that fills me with such enthusiasm: ... it is the Divinity that I adore.” (40)

Ambrosio is here described as a man who wants purity both in himself and in the woman he adores. It is the Holy Madonna’s purity which he worships. When he meets Madonna in the shape of Matilda, however, she makes him succumb to his sexual desires and thereby shows that this Madonna is not divine.

Lewis describes Matilda as an evil temptress, and he lets her use any shrewd device to destroy Ambrosio. She is cunning and intelligent, and knows exactly how to accomplish her goal. It is through Ambrosio’s religious feelings that she finally gets him trapped. She has listened to his sermons, and knows about his admiration of purity. After having placed her own image in the form of Madonna in his cell, she imitates the words of adoration that Ambrosio usually directs at this holy picture when she proclaims her feelings for him:

“Religion alone deserves you; and far is it from Matilda’s wish to draw you from the paths of virtue. What I feel for you is love, not licentiousness. I sigh to be possessor of your heart, not lust for the enjoyment of your person” (55). In other words, it seems as if Matilda’s emotions reflect Ambrosio’s own feelings for his ideal woman. In this way, Lewis creates an uncanny effect. It is created by the similar emotions of love expressed by Ambrosio and Matilda. She becomes a mirror of Ambrosio’s own feelings, and therefore her declaration of love is a doubling of, or a repetition of Ambrosio’s emotions. Repetition in itself is uncanny, and Matilda’s utterances of adoration create an uncanny feeling in Ambrosio whose mind is occupied with “opposing sentiments” (57). Her declaration of love seems familiar since he has proclaimed those same sentiments to the image of the Madonna. But since it is Matilda who expresses these emotions to him, the situation becomes unfamiliar and thus uncanny. Matilda mimics his personality, and it is this fact which flatters him and boosts his ego and feeling of power, and results in extreme narcissism which makes him discard his former humility.

According to traditional gender roles Ambrosio enjoys a superior position because he is a man and a monk. However, Lewis creates Matilda as a woman who manages to apply her sexuality so as to take control of the man. By so doing, he distances this female character from the prevailing gender roles both of the convent and of the outside world. Matilda’s uncanny personality seems to affect the relationship between the characters and their gender roles. Her resemblance to Madonna seems like a revelation to Ambrosio. The shock of experiencing his idol as a living woman makes him disregard his conscience as well as his order’s moral laws. As he gives in to his lusts, the decline of his religious authority begins. It might seem as if Matilda is in his power, since she is a woman who has lost her most precious virtue, her virginity to him. But the text emphasizes that it is Matilda who calmly tells him to disregard his feelings of guilt: “Guilt, did I say? In what consists ours, unless in the opinion of

the ill-judging world? Let that world be ignorant of them, and our joys become divine and blameless!” (194). These comforting words may also be interpreted as a menace since, besides Ambrosio, Matilda is the only one who knows about their transgression. He is dependent on her to keep his secret which, if made known, will damage his honour. Thus, Matilda has the upper hand in their relationship.

The gendered roles of the secular society also regulate what is considered acceptable sexual behaviour for men and women. Men are permitted to yield to their sexual desires to a much greater extent than women without being condemned as immoral. Therefore, it is also common to imagine the man as the hunter and the woman as the prey. Lewis lets Matilda overturn these norms as he describes how she uses both her female charms and religious ardour to ensnare Ambrosio and get him into her power.

The emotions which Ambrosio is portrayed to experience when Matilda emerges as the Holy Madonna’s double appear to be too intense for him to express. He endures an overwhelming passion created by a combination of the divine and the feminine, which is impossible to resist. This overpowering feeling of delight and fright is described by Edmund Burke in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* to stand for the sublime. Thus, it has the power to overwhelm and destroy. It is an emotion which completely overwhelms the mind and which creates both pleasure and terror at the same time. Ambrosio is portrayed as being conquered by such a feeling as he capitulates to Matilda’s female graces: “Drunk with desire, he pressed his lips to those which sought them; his kisses vied with Matilda’s in warmth and passion: he clasped her rapturously in his arms; he forgot his vows, his sanctity, and his fame, he remembered nothing but the pleasure and opportunity” (81). Also the combination of sexual delight and the danger it represents may be said to generate in him a feeling of the sublime. Burke maintains that our sense of the sublime rests on self-preservation, which is what terrifies and astonishes us (51).

In the novel, this is seen when Ambrosio after his first sexual experience is overcome by apprehension and remorse: “his heart was despondent, and became the abode of satiety and disgust” (193). He fears getting his sin exposed, and thereby his reputation and mighty position as a “Man of Holiness” destroyed. His self-preservation is aroused by the sublime: “he trembled at the consequences of a discovery: he looked forward with horror” (193).

Before long, Ambrosio realizes that Matilda’s life is in danger from the snake’s venom which she has extracted from his body to save him. The thought of losing her conquers Ambrosio’s fear of the church and God. However, he does not want to save her life simply because she endangered her life to save his. It is the unbearable thought of not being able to re-enact the sexual pleasure he has experienced with his mistress: “he no longer reflected with shame upon his incontinence, or dreaded the vengeance of offended heaven: his only fear was lest death should rob him of enjoyments ... the voluptuous monk trembled less for his preserver’s life than his concubine’s” (194). Matilda’s role as his saviour has become insignificant to the monk after she has fulfilled his sexual fantasy. She has been transformed from one female stereotype to another. She was his Madonna and has become his whore. Lust has defeated the magnitude of his position as a priest and his pride of moral perfection. This dramatic change in his character is described as deliberately brought about by Matilda as part of her contrivance to evoke Ambrosio’s destruction. She has played several roles to obtain her goal. She has been Ambrosio’s beloved friend, the novice Rosario; she has been the divine Madonna; and has become his mistress. She has worked her way into his heart by offering what a monk is allowed to accept, male friendship and reverence for the divine. Her project seems to be completed when she succeeds in breaking down his final moral resistance, but her scheme goes further yet. It is the perdition of his soul that she desires. From this point on Matilda is no longer described as a human being. She seems to have supernatural powers and she is in league with evil forces. Her new character brings another dimension of the uncanny

into the story. The feeling of the uncanny is created by the supernatural (156). She reveals to Ambrosio that she does not have to perish from the snake's poison since she has special means of preservation in her possession. "Intoxicated with pleasure," Ambrosio implores her to use the methods she has at her disposal (194). There is no indication in the text that Ambrosio at this point knows what he is asking for. To Ambrosio it is the life of his mistress which is at stake. The thought of losing the pleasures which Matilda can offer is what frightens him. The narrator comments ironically: "the die was thrown: his vows were already broken: he had already committed the crime, and why should he refrain from enjoying its reward?" (194).

2.3 The Gothic Environment and the Power of Darkness

Before Ambrosio's fall, the portrayal of the clerical society has mostly dealt with the clergy's search for perfection and their pure morality. After Ambrosio has broken his vows, the gothic elements of darkness and terror dominate the narrative. The whole atmosphere is altered. We are no longer in a splendid church, but in its gloomy vaults where the light of day never reaches. There is no lively crowd, only isolation, silence, and decaying bodies. It is in this setting that Matilda practises black magic: "she [Matilda] opened the wicket, and sought for the door leading to the subterraneous vaults where reposed the mouldering bodies of the votaries of St. Clare. The night was perfectly dark; neither moon nor stars were visible" (198). The darkness of the gothic setting is emphasized in this part of the story. The obscure vault with its impenetrable stone walls seems menacing since we feel that this is a place where dark deeds may be performed without being prevented by anyone. The darkness hides the moon and the stars and thus the familiar setting becomes unfamiliar because of the cover of darkness. The once living votaries of the sisterhood lie mouldering in the vaults and the decay of their bodies turns them in to something unknown. Both the darkness and death create an

uncanny setting. It is after this change that Lewis's critique of the church and its hypocrisy comes to light. An example is the revelation of the prioress' evil. Her character is described as that of a gothic villain who has nothing but cruelty to offer. Her contempt of her companion who asks her to be lenient with Agnes illustrates this:

Overlook it say you? ... 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! ... 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 vigour of which our severe laws admit ... To-morrow Agnes shall be made a terrible example of my justice and resentment. (199)

It is Ambrosio who is referred to as Madrid's idol. The prioress is ignorant of his moral misdemeanour, and her admiration for him reflects the superior position he has held so far, and also what might be the depth of his fall. What the prioress considers a personal insult and disgrace is that Agnes, in Ambrosio's presence, admitted that she had become pregnant after taking the veil. It is a prioress's duty to watch over the nuns' moral purity. Therefore her anger concerns her own position in Ambrosio's eyes, which she imagines to have weakened by Agnes's transgression. The selfishness and brutality of her character are revealed within the vaults of the convent. The darkness of the surroundings with their mouldering bodies frames the evil hidden behind the prioress's apparent virtue which is only a disguise. The prioress's wickedness is exposed in these uncanny surroundings where she is concealed from the world outside. In other words, the gothic elements of the setting underline her lack of mercy. Her heart seems to be made of stone just like the walls that surround her.

The description of dead bodies in the cavern of the church creates an appropriate setting for malice where darkness functions as its cover. It also conceals Ambrosio's presence to the prioress. He is there together with Matilda who is on a secret undertaking involving evil

forces. The prioress does not know that she is overheard when passing judgement on Agnes. The combination of the characters' secretive actions and the setting illustrates the old notion that evil forces reign beneath the surface, in Hell, while what is associated with the good is placed high above, in Heaven. The tombs remind us of death and its afterlife which is unknown to the living. Although death is unfamiliar, it is part of everybody's destiny, and hence familiar. Therefore death is uncanny, and objects associated with it bring forth the same uncanniness which may expose the unconscious and the repressed. With regard to the Prioress, pride may be seen as her repressed vice. She is affected by the uncanny ambience to such an extent that her evil is revealed.

The dark does not only unmask the characters' nature, it also exposes occult mysteries. It is in the dark that Matilda calls upon supernatural forces in order to preserve her own life: "then was it that, surrounded by mouldering bodies, I dared to perform those mystic rites which summoned to my aid a fallen angel" (229). The gothic setting and supernatural elements mirror the prioress and Ambrosio's transition from holiness to immorality. The change in Ambrosio is strongly encouraged by Matilda, and she effectively impedes his wish to save Agnes from the vengeful Prioress. She does not permit him to feel compassion with another human being: "Rather redouble your outward austerity and thunder out menaces against the errors of others, the better to conceal your own. Abandon the nun to her fate" is the advice she gives him (199). Matilda has also changed her attitude towards Ambrosio. He reflects on the fact that she used to be "the mildest and softest of her sex," but now she assumed a sort of "courage and manliness" and she spoke to command (200). He blames her for lacking the feminine virtue of pity, yet obeys her. Ambrosio's character is thus described as increasingly devoid of consideration for others. Even Ambrosio's affection for Matilda soon grows cold when he encounters a new temptation in Antonia, the embodiment of innocence. After talking to her, Ambrosio starts to refer to Matilda as Rosario in his own

thoughts. Matilda's commanding behaviour obviously makes him regard her as fitting her male role again: "here we have a second Vincentio della Ronda. Rosario's adventure began thus" (207). Ambrosio's infatuation with Antonia encourages Matilda to show her close relationship with evil, supernatural powers. At a point in the novel where the reader might have expected the description of a jealous Matilda, she is surprisingly portrayed as Ambrosio's willing assistant in dishonouring Antonia. Lewis describes Ambrosio's sublime experience as the emotions of pleasures and terror clash in his mind when Matilda conjures up a fallen angel to help him fulfil his evil plan:

It was now that Ambrosio repented of his rashness ... He waited with fear for the spirit's appearance ... He looked wildly around him, expecting that some dreadful apparition would meet his eyes ... a cold shivering seized his body ... Ambrosio started, and expected the daemon with terror. What was his surprise when, the thunder ceasing to roll, a full strain of melodious music sounded in the air! ... and he beheld a figure more beautiful than fancy's pencil ever drew ... Enchanted at a vision so contrary to his expectations, Ambrosio gazed upon the spirit with delight and wonder. (237)

Sorcery and supernatural forces are associated with the underworld and the Devil, which are reflected in Ambrosio's feelings of terror in connection with the preternatural. The supernatural is unknown and inexplicable and is therefore experienced as dangerous. It is considered stronger than any human force. It might therefore seem natural to designate the supernatural as belonging to the masculine category since power is traditionally associated with men. However, according to the Catholic Church's demonologists, women are the Devil's best accomplices on earth. It is therefore not surprising that it is Matilda who is assigned the role as witch. She appears in female shape, but her sex is questioned since she was first introduced as Rosario and is embodied with masculine traits. In addition to this she

has the Madonna's features and the Devil's power, a combination that calls forth the uncanny as well as the sublime. The uncanny is connected with her supernatural power and the unfamiliar in her role as a woman. The sublime is a result of her beauty which is also frightening since she is the evil image of the holy Madonna. Following Burke the beautiful cannot cause the sublime since it only evokes the feeling of pleasure. However, since Matilda is portrayed in the picture of the Madonna, her beauty becomes divine and divinity makes us, "rejoice with trembling" which is caused by the thought of the force of the divine which "nothing can withstand" (Burke 87). Because Matilda collaborates with the Devil, her powers are associated with evil and pain, and her divine beauty is connected with evil forces. Her features and her power are in combination sublime. She is uncanny as a woman and supernatural and sublime as divine and powerful. Thus, Matilda mirrors the effect of the spirit she evokes.

Ambrosio's fear of the Devil originates from his belief that he has the power to punish him for the sins he has committed. Power may create the sublime since it may cause terror, pain, and even death, but it can also cause pleasure since power may function as a means to achieve a feeling of greatness and flattery in one's mind (Burke 65). However, as the supernatural creature appears before Ambrosio as a beautiful being, his fear turns into admiration. The feared element, the horrid Devil, has a beautiful form and therefore the sense of danger lessens. The beautiful features of the evil spirit evoked by Matilda inspire in Ambrosio feelings of tenderness and warmth towards it. The beautiful has a tendency to call forth positive sensations, but as long as the feeling which the beautiful arouses is only pleasurable, it is not equivalent with the sublime (55). The sublime is an overwhelming emotion which is mixed with frightening awe. Confronted with evil in a pleasing shape, Ambrosio is under the influence of the sublime, which is what transforms him from a "Man of God" to the Devil's collaborator. He is enchanted with the displayed beauty and distances

himself from his former position as a “Man of Holiness.” The fact that Ambrosio is depicted as easily influenced by the demon’s beauty demonstrates the hypocrisy of his monastic role. A man of God should not put appearance before essence. It also accentuates his own desire for power as he accepts the aid of the Devil’s magic in order to satisfy his sexual desire regarding Antonia.

Her whiteness of complexion is a stark contrast to the darkness of the convent vaults which are also the setting of Ambrosio’s merciless assault on her. She is deprived of her virginity which in the context of the novel means total dishonour and disgrace. Apart from murder, no more serious crime can be committed against a woman. It is Matilda’s supernatural forces that have made it possible for him to ravish the young woman. Antonia’s symbolic whiteness is spoiled, and the dark forces rule in Ambrosio’s heart. He gets no satisfaction from the crime he has committed. He does not even pity Antonia. On the contrary, she creates aversion and rage in his heart (329). The portrayal of the violent rape of Antonia and the detailed description of Ambrosio’s extreme emotional outburst after the misdeed create an uncanny effect as his true character, which has hitherto been repressed, surfaces and is shown without clerical disguise. He appears blind to his own vices and makes his victim responsible for the atrocity he has committed:

Wretched girl, you must stay here with me! Here amidst these lonely tombs, these images of death, these rotting, loathsome, corrupted bodies! here shall you stay, and witness my sufferings; witness what it is to be in the horrors of despondency, and breathe the last groan in blasphemy and curses! And whom am I to thank for this? What seduced me into crimes, whose bare remembrance makes me shudder? Fatal witch! Was it not thy beauty? Have you not plunged my soul into infamy? (330)

Antonia’s terror both before and after the rape is described in detail and emphasizes her victimized role. She has been an admirer of Ambrosio’s virtue, but must experience him as

her destroyer. The way in which Lewis depicts Antonia's frustration upon noticing Ambrosio's transformed character shows that she is under the influence of the uncanny. She sees the monk that she looks up to, but his eyes reflect a character unknown to her: "Good Ambrosio, take me from hence! – will you not? Oh! will you not? – Do not look on me thus! Your flaming eyes terrify me! – Spare me, father! Oh! spare me for God's sake!" (326). His familiar character has become unfamiliar as he no longer plays the role of the virtuous monk. Their relationship has changed, and Antonia can only perceive him as a villain. Ambrosio and Antonia have become gothic types: he the male villain, she the victimized virgin. These are the roles they play until the end of the novel.

The uncanny and the sublime are emotions strongly linked to gothic literature, and both dominate the relationship between the perpetrator and his victim. Danger does not bring forth the sublime, but the thought of danger or a terrible sight might do so (Burke 73). Thus, the feeling Antonia experiences before the rape, when the change in Ambrosio awakes an idea of danger in her mind, is the sublime. Also the actual sight of the altered monk might be terrifying enough to evoke the sublime in Antonia. Ambrosio experiences the sublime as a mixture of sexual pleasure and fear of the consequences of his crime. It is caused by his contradictory feelings. The sublime is thus the results of the characters' actions and reactions, while the gothic environment creates the uncanny through its threatening darkness and closeness to decaying bodies. Also the readers might experience these feelings as the story's settings and plot unfold before them and make impressions on their minds.

The fact that Ambrosio's crime is carried out in the vaults underground links it to the dead bodies and the decay mentioned earlier. This is the setting of sordid actions and deadly fear which Antonia experiences when she fights her assailant. Ambrosio is also affected by his surroundings. Because he is in the darkness and knows that "no aid is near" for Antonia, he can fulfil his desires and exercise his control over her. The darkness which brings about

Ambrosio's sexual nature results in the destruction of Antonia's purity, her whiteness, which reflects her virginity. After her rape her mind becomes as dark as her surroundings, and her former white flawless skin is torn. She has become the tragic and grieving victim of a sexually besotted villain: "The unfortunate had fainted ere the completion of her disgrace: she only recovered life to be sensible of her misfortune ... Oppressed with grief, she continued for some time in this state of torpidity" (329). The fact that Antonia is portrayed to be grieving her loss of reputation underlines her position as outcast or a fallen woman in the society and time of the story. Being the injured party of a serious crime does not seem to be a mitigating circumstance. What has been lost cannot be restored because "she could never hope to be creditably established; she would be marked with infamy, and condemned to sorrow and solitude for the remainder of her existence" (331).

Ambrosio's role as the villain is always displayed in relation to women who live in accordance with the feminine norms. After he has violated them and spoiled their reputation he loses interest in them. Lewis seems to suggest that the ideals of purity might in themselves be sources of temptation, while the so-called impure call forth feelings of disgust and fear in those who are confronted with them.

An example of this is the Bleeding Nun, a gothic character which belongs to the darkness of the night. Her abode is an old castle which is also a common gothic setting. Her story can be interpreted in terms of the uncanny. She haunts Don Raymond after he has mistaken her for Agnes. What confuses him and produces an uncanny effect is the nun's declaration of love: The words pronounced are identical to those which Raymond himself articulated to the ghost when he thought it was the woman of his heart: "Thou art mine! Raymond! Raymond! I am thine!" (140). Words and feelings that are repeated recall a familiar situation, but since the repetition occurs under new circumstances it is also unfamiliar and therefore uncanny. In this case it is no longer Raymond's beloved who is standing in front

of him dressed as a ghost; it is actually a spectre which seems to have supernatural powers and is therefore dangerous. The fact that a ghost which is a living dead has the faculty to feel love, an emotion which is associated with a pounding heart and thus life, seems to indicate that the apparition itself does not know that it is not alive. Being able to feel love, it may also harbour feelings of hatred. This is a frightening idea since the supernatural is associated with magical powers which may cause disasters. It is this fear which makes him react with horror in the scene where the Bleeding Nun visits him at night: "My limbs were chained in second infancy: once more I heard those fatal words repeated ... The spectre again pressed her lips to mine, again touched me with her rotten fingers ... every succeeding visit inspired me with greater horror" (142). The reactions which the ghost causes indicate that it is not only the uncanny linked to the supernatural which scares Raymond; it is also the fact that his masculinity is put to test. The features of the ghost are womanly and therefore associated with the feminine. That is why her control over Raymond undermines his authority as a man. As a man he is expected to be in control of the woman. He therefore assumes a feminine role since he is controlled by a powerful and female-looking creature: "My blood was frozen in my veins. I would have called for aid, but the sound expired ere it could pass my lips. My nerves was bound up in impotence, and I remained in the same attitude inanimate as a statue ... My eyes were fascinated and I had not the power of withdrawing them from the spectre" (140).

The ghost overpowers him completely, and he is not able to fight back. When it kisses and touches him against his will, the situation recalls the control which Ambrosio has over Antonia when raping her in the darkness of the vaults. The fear which overcomes Raymond in the presence of the Bleeding Nun undermines his masculinity as well as his supposed control of language. His role changes because of the ghost's powerful presence. He becomes a victim of the Bleeding Nun's love, just like Antonia becomes a victim of Ambrosio's lust. The uncanny feelings created by darkness and supernatural elements overwhelm Raymond to such

an extent that he loses his sense of reality concerning who he is and what he experiences. He is victimized by the ghost's power which positions him in a feminine role, and thus his masculinity is challenged. Therefore the traditional borders between the roles of the male and the female are blurred.

2.4 The Overpowering Feminine

Even though the Bleeding Nun is a ghost and by the logic of her status belongs outside the category of gender, she may be seen as an example of overpowering femininity with which Lewis has endowed many of the novel's female characters. Don Raymond's feeling of weakness and impotence in his encounter with the apparition points to her supernatural quality that has a paralysing effect on him. That quality overshadows the fact that she is a woman, except for when she takes an active role, kisses him and proclaims her love for him. Furthermore, she appears in the shape of a woman wearing a bloody veil which carries the symbolism of lost female virtue and violence. The Bleeding Nun represents all females, who in the society of the story, are categorized as fallen women. Agnes, for whom the Bleeding Nun is mistaken, belongs to the same category. The obvious similarities between these two characters are in their role as nuns who are both guilty of violating their vows. They have transgressed the gendered norms of their time and therefore lost their reputation. Their open exposure of female sexuality seems to immobilize those who face them and make them mute. This happens to Don Raymond when the spectre kisses him, and the Prioress experiences the loss of language when she learns of Agnes's pregnancy.

The Prioress is portrayed as a masculine character in the sense that she has the power to command without feeling empathy with others. Lack of pity is what Ambrosio finds unfeminine and unattractive in Matilda (200), which seems to suggest that this is a masculine characteristic.

The Prioress has the power to forgive and to destroy Agnes. Without hesitation she makes the latter choice. In her eyes Agnes is a woman who has destroyed the reputation of her sisterhood as well as that of the Prioress herself. Agnes's femaleness, which her pregnancy highlights, provokes the Prioress and shows her true nature: "the domina's countenance grew inflamed with passion" (45). Like Raymond, she loses her language as a result of the femaleness exposed: "Words were inadequate to express her fury. She was silent" (45). Agnes with her so-called impure morality seems to paralyze the Prioress. The femaleness which Agnes represents is not in accordance with what is expected of an unmarried woman, and especially not of a nun. She has transgressed the traditional rules for feminine behaviour and, like the Bleeding Nun, she is a disgraced woman. Agnes's pregnancy undermines the Prioress's authority, and unpunished Agnes would endanger the respect for the existing norms both in the convent and in society. Agnes also reminds the prioress of the femaleness which she herself has repressed. Thus, Agnes's exposure of female sexuality challenges the life-style of the convent where the prioress holds a prominent position. The Prioress is so affected by this that she is unable to utter a word. It is only when Agnes is removed from the Prioress's sight that she regains her power to communicate and thereby the authority to pass judgement on the wrongdoer: "The laws of our order are strict and severe; they have fallen into disuse of late; but the crime of Agnes shows me the necessity of their revival ... Agnes shall be the first to feel the rigour of those laws, which shall be obeyed to the very letter" (46). She finally overcomes her silence, which in the novel generally functions as an indication of female weakness. She needs to recuperate her authoritative role by punishing Agnes and situating her helpless in the darkness of the vaults of the convent where no one can see her strength, and where silence reigns: "A profound and melancholy silence prevailed through the vault" (345). However, not even the menacing loneliness surrounding Agnes in her prison can force her to be quiet: "I stretched my voice and shrieked for aid" (345).

Agnes is depicted as a strong female who does not give in to despair. Abandoned and alone she gives birth to her child, and she does not even let death or sorrow overpower her or destroy her strength when her child dies and its body moulders in her arms. The dead child becomes a symbol of her female strength, and her refusal to give up her motherhood:

In solitude and misery, abandoned by all, unassisted by art, uncomforted by friendship, with pangs which if witnessed would have touched the hardest heart, was I delivered of my wretched burthen. It came alive into the world, but I knew not how to treat it, or by what means to preserve its existence ... I witnessed its death with agonies ... But my grief was unavailing ... I placed it on my bosom, its soft arm folded round my neck, and its pale cold cheek resting upon mine. Thus did its lifeless limbs repose, while I covered it with kisses, talked to it, wept, and moaned over it ... [and] I vowed not to part with it while I had life. (351)

She compensates for her loss by preserving the dead body of her baby and caressing it with love. The way in which this scene is depicted through Agnes's own eyes adds power to her character as she has the ability to tell her story, to use language, and redeem her past.

However, her role as a faithful mother differs from how mothers are usually described in gothic literature where they are often absent characters (Cavallaro 150). Agnes, however, maintains her role as a mother even after her child is dead, and is therefore a good example of a mother trying to defeat death to keep her child close to her.

Elvira, Antonia's mother, is another character who challenges the boundaries of death: as a protective ghost, she returns to warn Antonia about her coming death and to promise that they will meet again (275). Elvira's role is complicated by the fact that she is also Ambrosio's mother. As long as she is alive neither she nor Ambrosio is aware of their mother-son relationship. Ambrosio's childhood as an orphan handed over to the church is in keeping with the gothic tradition of the abandoned child (Cavallaro 150). He has never been guided by a

caring mother, and when he finally meets Elvira it is not to be happily reunited. Ambrosio's role is to destroy what Elvira has devoted her life to cherishing and protecting; her daughter's blameless reputation. Elvira is the hindrance which he must rid himself of to satisfy his lust. The familiar relationship between mother and son is thus made unfamiliar, a fact which augments the severity of Ambrosio's crimes and thereby appears uncanny. It is his mother and sister he unknowingly destroys. It is also the morally blameless monk who appears as the cruel villain. Once again the familiar has become unfamiliar. The gothic atmosphere of horror seems to be created by portraying familiar situations and characters as unfamiliar. Lewis uses the effect of the uncanny also in his criticism of the Catholic Church. Like Ambrosio, the Prioress holds a trusted position within the Church. However, she is portrayed as evil and revengeful. Thus, her character stands in stark contrast to the familiar Christian ideals, and she appears unfamiliar in her role and is therefore uncanny. This highlights the church's hypocrisy since its leaders' practices are not in accordance with their teaching. Lewis makes the Prioress pay for her cruelty by letting an angry mob get hold of her and kill her in a most horrifying manner:

The rioters heeded nothing but the gratification of their barbarous vengeance ... They tore her one from another, and each new tormentor was more savage than the former ... dragged her through the streets, spurning her, trampling her, and treating her with every species of cruelty which hate or vindicate fury could invent ... she sank upon the ground bathed in blood, and in a few minutes terminated her miserable existence.
(306)

The reason for the rioters' fury is that Agnes's tragic story has become known, and the desire for vengeance overpowers them. The sublime is expressed through people's extreme feelings of sympathy for Agnes. They identify with her fate to such a degree that they feel her sufferings. Burke argues that sympathy may create the feeling of the sublime because "this

passion may...partake of nature of those which regard self-preservation, and, turning upon pain, may be a source of the sublime” (57). The account of Agnes’s loss of her child while she is a prisoner in the vaults of the convent and her agony as she holds on to the body of her dead child excite wild passions in people. It is a woman’s story which touches because it concerns childbirth and motherhood, aspects of a woman’s life which embody mythological qualities. Therefore they arouse sublime passions through empathy, and in this case sublime feelings create killers.

Ambrosio who is described as an authoritarian figure loses his power in the encounter with strong femininity. First and foremost, Matilda who is the preserver of his life at the same time as she causes his fall from power. At the beginning she uses her femininity to boost his ego and stress his superiority: “She appeared the mildest and softest of her sex, devoted to his will and looking up to him as to a superior being” (200). When she sees that he is affected by her admiration, her subordinate role changes to that of authority. Since she has lost her virginity and purity Ambrosio is no longer controlled by her femininity, but he is influenced by her masculinity which is a new trait in her personality: “She assumed a sort of manliness in her manners and discourse ... She spoke no longer to insinuate, but commanded... he grieved that Matilda preferred the virtues of his sex to those of her own” (200). After Matilda’s transformation it is her masculine qualities which keep him in control.

The other female character who contributes to Ambrosio’s fall is very different from Matilda. All the adjectives used to describe Antonia reflect her embodiment of feminine ideals. In her eyes there is a melancholy which hints at her weakness as an emotional individual (207). Following Burke’s theory of the beautiful, “the beauty of women is considerable owing to their weakness or delicacy,” and it is “their timidity, a quality of mind analogous to it” which enchants men (146). Antonia’s appearance mirrors the norms of feminine beauty. Her femaleness overpowers the monk’s mind and provokes a strong urge to

see her outside the convent walls. At their first encounter, the emotions which Ambrosio expresses to Antonia are those of respect. However, as her character and her femininity become familiar to him, he no longer admires, but desires her innocence. To him she is changed from pure innocence to an irresistible sexual object, just like his Madonna's femininity has been transformed into a prostitute by Matilda (210). Antonia's feminine qualities become a danger to her person as it is these aspects of her personality which inspire Ambrosio's lustful actions: "Grown used to her modesty, it no longer commanded the same respect and awe: he still admired it, but it only made him more anxious to deprive her of that quality which formed her principal charm" (220). It is thus, her femininity which dooms Antonia to destruction as Ambrosio has been overpowered by it and resolves upon "the innocent Antonia's ruin" (256).

2.5 The Three A's and the Death of the Gendered Norms

Throughout the novel Antonia is described as almost angelic, and the ideal which she represents illustrates her blameless character: "she thought the world was composed only of those who resembled her, and that vice existed was to her still a secret" (214). Not only her innocence, but also her ignorance is a quality which her mother, Elvira, has diligently protected and encouraged to make her fit for a respectable husband, and thereby secure a safe future for her daughter. Nevertheless, these female virtues lead to Antonia's destruction. She is the perfect feminine character "beyond praise," and appears at first as a sort of heroine whose behaviour and attitudes are unnaturally blameless. However, Lewis's depiction of her extreme femininity can be seen as a ridicule of the perfection which the feminine norms of the time required. Her character is the complete opposite of that of Agnes who is the female character who seems to have the author's sympathy. The name of Agnes bears the meaning of purity which is ironic with regard to her character since she yields to sexual desires and is

therefore not so-called morally pure (Campbell). Still, Lewis lets her overcome her hardship, and thus he apparently supports the rebel's choice to disregard society's expectations. Agnes has been given the role as the Final Girl, the term used in our time for the surviving girl in horror movies. She represents abject terror personified as "she alone looks death in the face" at the same time as she finds the strength to conquer death long enough to be rescued (Clover 35). In contrast to Antonia whose feminine weakness dooms her to death, Agnes's non-standard femininity is triumphant. Not only is Agnes given the role of the rebel, but she is also the demolisher of the feminine ideal of the time, and thus she questions the gendered norms. Although she represents the so-called fallen woman, her overpowering femaleness reveals the hypocrisy of both the church and society with their shared ideal of purity.

The perfection which the church and the clergy seem to embody at the beginning of the novel is obliterated when the "sole uncorrupted pillar of the church," Ambrosio, falls prey to human temptations and lust (39). His role as the "idol of Madrid" or "the Man of God" is played by a saint-like character (19). When he lets evil infuse his mind and govern his actions the image of the fallen angel the Devil, is called to mind.

2.6 The Devil and his Associate

Supernatural elements assume many different forms, such as ghosts, demons and the Devil himself. The latter personally informs Ambrosio of the fact that Matilda is a supernatural being whom he has used to destroy the "holiness" of Ambrosio: "I bade a subordinate but crafty spirit assume a similar form [as the picture of the Madonna], and you eagerly yielded to the blandishments of Matilda" (305). The Devil highlights Ambrosio's sins and enlightens him with regard to the severity of his crimes when he tells him that the rape of Antonia was incestuous and that he murdered his own mother by killing Elvira: "You [Ambrosio] have shed the blood of two innocents; Antonia and Elvira perished by your hand ... Antonia whom

you violated, was your sister! ... Elvira whom you murdered, gave you birth! ... abandoned hypocrite! Inhuman parricide! Incestuous ravisher!” (375). The role of the devil is to emphasize that Ambrosio’s piety is only a mask he wears in order to cover for his misdeeds, and to point out the transformation Ambrosio has gone through in the course of the novel. His character is completely changed. He is no longer a moral example for all but has become a villain who has committed the most frightening atrocities.

However, the Devil too wears a mask concealing his true character the first time he appears: “It was a youth ... the perfection of whose form and face was unrivalled ... he was perfectly naked ... two crimson wings extended themselves from his shoulders... his form shone with dazzling glory: he was surrounded by clouds of rose-coloured light, and, at the moment he appeared, a refreshing air breathed perfumes through the cavern” (237). The Devil’s beauty is used to enchant Ambrosio to submit to his powers. The Devil’s angel mask gives him qualities which mark him as trustworthy and grand. However, he is also a supernatural being which inspires Ambrosio with “secret awe” (237). Thus, he is besieged by a blend of feelings ranging from admiration of the beautiful to fear of the unknown. In accordance with Burke’s theory of the beautiful and the sublime, the feelings caused by the beautiful are different from those which the sublime creates. The beautiful is founded on pleasure whereas the sublime is based on pain (158). The beautiful only creates a pleasurable feeling while the sublime is dominated by a feeling of pain combined with delight. Hence, Ambrosio’s emotions in his encounter with beauty which is also evil might be characterized as sublime. However, when Ambrosio faces the fallen angel he is in close contact with the supernatural which is in itself uncanny (Freud 153). Consequently, both the sublime and the uncanny are feelings involved during Ambrosio’s paranormal experience. The mixed emotions of admiration, awe and fear take control over his mind. These passions make logical

reasoning impossible. Ambrosio's intellect is overwhelmed, and when he agrees to the Devil's proposition he is not able to understand the consequence of his choice.

Lewis seems to use the notion of pride in order to explain Ambrosio's transformation from saint to the Devil's accomplice. It is his vain pride which causes him to lust for power to such an extent that he is willing to cooperate with evil forces. Although Lewis lets the Devil appear in beauty at Ambrosio's first encounter with him, he is soon presented in an appearance which mirrors his evil character: "Lucifer stood before him [Ambrosio] a second time ... He appeared in all that ugliness which since his fall from heaven had been his portion ... A swarthy darkness spread itself over his gigantic form ... Fury glared in his eyes, which might have struck the bravest heart with terror" (369). The darkness that surrounds the Devil's presence emphasizes his ruthlessness, which makes Ambrosio tremble for his life, and in this scene a moral battle seems to take place in his mind. Lewis shows that his main character does not readily give in to the Devil's temptation. He still has some conscience left: "Can nothing satisfy you but my eternal ruin? Spirit, you ask too much ... Infinite is the Almighty's mercy, and the penitent shall meet his forgiveness. My crimes are monstrous, but I will not despair of pardon" (370). In the end, Ambrosio's self-preservation seems to make him commit the unforgivable sin of selling his soul to the Devil since his only alternative is death. The idea of death is uncanny and to preserve his life Ambrosio is persuaded to become the Devil's servant (Haughton 52). Even though the idea of being in league with evil is frightening, the uncanniness of death as portrayed by the Devil himself is even more terrifying: "He described the death in the most terrific colours; and he worked so powerfully upon Ambrosio's despair and fears, that he prevailed upon him to receive the parchment" (371).

At the end, Lewis chooses to let the Devil destroy Ambrosio: "the dæmon continued to soar aloft, till, reaching a dreadful height, he released the sufferer. Headlong fell the monk through the airy waste; the sharp point of rock received him" (376). The Devil lets an evil

spirit assume the human form of Matilda in order to cause the monk's fall. In other words, evil disguised as a woman is responsible for wrecking Ambrosio's character. Lewis's portrayal of the woman as a destructive force reflects the notion that woman is the Devil's tool on earth, and might be used by him to lead human souls to perdition.

In this case the woman in the service of evil is endowed with the Madonna's features and a masculine character. She tempts Ambrosio with her sexuality, and as he gives in to the temptation. Matilda becomes controlling and commanding, and she takes the man's role in their relationship. This is uncanny since it does not fit the familiar conception of feminine behaviour. Ambrosio is depicted as victimized by Matilda. To him her powers are sublime. Her control over him gives him sexual pleasure at the same time as he is repelled by the "astonishing powers of her mind" which remind him of a man's intelligence (200). She controls Ambrosio's body with her femaleness, and she controls his mind with her powerful and reasoning language to such an extent that he finds himself "unable to cope with her in argument" (200). She also manages to dissuade Ambrosio from saving Agnes from the Prioress's revenge. Thus, she prevents him from doing a good deed: "Beware what you do ... your sudden change of sentiment may naturally create surprise, and may give birth to suspicions which it is most our interest to avoid ... Your interfering might be dangerous ... she is unworthy to enjoy love's pleasures, who has not wit enough to conceal them (199). Her power of words is strong enough to silence the great orator, Ambrosio, who has earlier been portrayed as unsurpassable in the art eloquence. It is through language that Lewis lets her manipulate Ambrosio's ideas and behaviour. Thus, the masculine power which Ambrosio is endowed with at the beginning of the novel, and which seems to be the origin of his narcissism and pride, is transferred onto Matilda.

However, her masculinity causes Ambrosio to lose interest in her, and her feminine features are thus no longer desirable to him: "Every moment convinced him of the astonishing

power of her mind; but what she gained in the opinion of the man, she lost with interest in the affection of the lover” (200). Matilda arouses strong and confusing feelings in Ambrosio. Since gender is performative, it may be looked upon as form of art, in the sense that roles are played according to norms which are equivalent to a script. Matilda seems to play two roles simultaneously, and her astonishing performance is to Ambrosio a mixture of the uncanny and a pleasurable experience. Burke argues that art may bring forth pleasurable feelings as it portrays emotions which affect a spectator (62). Imitation is a type of art which Burke links to the performativity of gender. It is one of our strongest links to society; since we imitate each other according to norms in order to be accepted (63). Matilda has such a great impact on Ambrosio because she incorporates both masculine and feminine features in her performance. She appropriates part of what should have been Ambrosio’s role in their relationship and therefore her role appears both familiar and unfamiliar, and thus uncanny.

Lewis shows that Ambrosio’s virtue is only a facade by letting Matilda overpower him and reduce him to a moral wreck. He provides her with a tool which he has earlier portrayed Ambrosio to master so perfectly, the power of language, which she uses to push the monk over the moral edge:

That mind which I esteemed so great and valiant, proves to be feeble, puerile, and grovelling, a slave to vulgar errors, and weaker than a woman’s ... tis not respect for God which restrains you, but the terror of his vengeance! Fain would you offend him in secret, but you tremble to profess yourself his foe. Now shame on the coward soul, which wants the courage either to be a firm friend, or an open enemy! (231)

By tagging him with feminine characteristics, and thus label him as weak, Matilda awakens the monk’s pride in his authoritarian role which can only be maintained as long as he retains his masculinity. Therefore Ambrosio agrees to Matilda’s plan. After the monk has fallen prey to temptation, the Devil lets the birds peck out Ambrosio’s eyes: “The eagles of the rock tore

his flesh piecemeal, and dug out his eye-balls with their cooked beaks” (376). The once so powerful monk’s degradation is thus complete. At the end of the novel Lewis seems to let all sympathy with the monk evaporate. He leaves him without a trace of his former glory. He is now the villain whose soul awaits eternal damnation, his body is torn, and he is blind. The latter fact emphasizes the final transformation of his character since losing one’s eyes is said to be a symbol of castration, and thus the ending of the story may be seen as the complete emasculation of Ambrosio (Freud 139). Neither his manhood nor his masculinity is intact.

Conclusion

This thesis has pointed out that power roles which govern the characters' lives are altered by emotions caused by gothic elements, and gender roles which are connected to power are thus destroyed. It has also been shown that the characters wear social masks which hide their true nature and power relations between them. Furthermore, the thesis demonstrates that the unmasking of the characters does not only expose their true nature, it also uncovers the falsity of the social roles both within the church and society at large.

The changes in power relations occur when the characters are placed in situations which produce passions that overpower their reason. It is the characters' encounter with supernatural forces in gothic settings which generate a rush of emotions which are impossible to resist. These are feelings of fear and helplessness, and even pleasure and delight which in combination create a sublime experience strong enough to overshadow reason and therefore unmask the characters. The general atmosphere of death and gloom which dominates the setting is uncanny, and consequently it influences the characters' reactions and contributes to revealing their true nature and thus the power relations between them are also altered.

The beginning of the novel portrays fixed gender roles both within the church and within society in general. Even so, gender is revealed to be a variable hidden under a mask of stability which the characters wear in order to fit into society. Although characters in gothic literature are normally perceived as types, the major characters seem to go through personality changes before they end up as typical villains or victims. The characters' different roles expose power relations, and when the characters change, the power roles they hold are altered accordingly. This illustrates that the social roles, including gender roles, endorsed by both the secular and the clerical world are not fixed.

Lewis presents the feminine gender role as an unnatural performance which might have disastrous consequences. Women are portrayed as men's objects and admired for their

purity and meekness. Thus, character traits which reflect inexperience and weakness are looked upon as feminine virtues. Antonia is a symbol of the lack of power embodied in the traditional feminine role, since everything, from her silence to her ignorance, signals her dependence upon others. Her character is the only constant in Lewis's novel. She is portrayed as a pure feminine ideal from the beginning to the end. Still, her femininity is also the reason for her tragic fate, since it is her innocence and "perfection" which Ambrosio seeks to destroy. She is only guilty of being feminine in the way the church and society demand from a woman. However, these proscribed ideals do not protect Antonia. It seems that Lewis reveals the falsity of the traditional feminine role by his account of Antonia's tragedy. She is the only character who does not wear a mask. She represents the gothic type of the victimized woman and therefore she does not survive. Through her fate Lewis unmask the gendered norms of society and the ideals which doom women to ignorance and thus also to danger and destruction.

It might be argued that gender roles are as much proscribed for men as for women. However, men are superior to women because of the power structures and hierarchical principles that govern society. Therefore their roles do not restrict their lives to the same extent. Men seem to have the opportunities to realize their true potential, and they may even transgress norms by voluntarily changing their social masks. Both Don Raymond and Theodore are male characters that disguise their true identity when it suits their purpose. Apart from Matilda who is in league with supernatural forces, no female character is portrayed to have the same choice regarding the masks which they wear. It should be noted that the extent of freedom assigned to the characters is class related. Those who hold noble titles can command anyone of lower social position, and a man will always have authority over a woman if their background is equal.

Lewis's critique of society seems first and foremost to concern its gender norms and in particular the restricted role assigned to women. Elvira, Antonia's mother, who is responsible for Antonia's guidance in fulfilling the feminine norms, perishes. Thus, Lewis seems to discard the idea that a happy life for a woman is dependent on her ability to adapt to the reigning feminine ideals. On the contrary, he indicates that Antonia's upbringing is harmful.

Lewis's sympathy seems to be with Agnes, through whom he exposes the church's abuse of power. She is punished by the Prioress because she does not live her life according to the role expected of her, and she is saved for following her heart and natural instinct by Lewis. Agnes might at first seem to fit into the gothic type of the victimised woman. However, in the end she is the female character who obtains what in the context of the novel is the ultimate reward for a woman, to be married. This is a deviation from the traditional ideals because the female character who disregards societies' norms, emerges victorious. Agnes's destiny can also be seen as a critique of the power relation between the sexes. As a woman, Agnes is not in the position to choose her own role. Since she has been forced to take the veil, her moral mask is not chosen by herself.

By giving the narrative voice to Agnes, Lewis gives her control of her own story and provides her with the power to influence the listeners and the readers emotionally. As a representative of the so-called fallen women, she is given a new and influential role. Hence, Lewis seems to support the unmasked woman rather than the artificial feminine ideal.

Although men are able to control their own lives, the brethren in the monastery must stick to strict rules. Lewis uses this fact in order to ridicule their morality and the church's position in society. Ambrosio's position highlights the church's power with regard to the secular world. The church's claims its supremacy because of its assumed moral standing as a bridge between God and man. As long as the representatives of the church live up to the expected moral standard, it is possible for them to dictate people's lives, and thus preserve the

power of the church. The church relies and employs a mask of purity. It is possible to argue that in the relationship between church and society at large, the church performs a masculine role since it imposes authority on the outside world. The members of the secular society need the church in order to avoid God's wrath and thereby assume a feminine role of dependence. The patriarchal structure is reflected in the power relation between the two societies. The binary of church and society is similar to that of man and woman.

Criticism of the church and society is at the core of Lewis's romance. The church tells the outside world to fear the Devil. Paradoxically it is its representative Ambrosio, "the man of Holiness," (19) who is tempted by the Devil in the end. His mask of virtue is ripped off, and thereby the church is also unmasked. By describing the fall of Ambrosio, the "uncorrupted pillar of the church," (39) Lewis demonstrates the corruption of the power elite of the clerical world. The authorities of the church, the Prioress and Ambrosio, are revealed to be evil and are therefore destroyed. The power of the church is weakened and the secular world is no longer under its moral control.

As this thesis has demonstrated, masks are used to protect and preserve social positions in society and the novel's plot seems to be constructed around the unmasking of its characters. The way Lewis presents his characters both before and after their unmasking creates an image of a carnival where the characters wear their masks and perform their roles according to a social script. The carnival is also associated with the church since it marks the beginning of the Christian lent, the period of fasting and repentance. The idea that the Christian ideals are only masks and therefore not real may be seen as a mockery of the church and its teaching. The way in which Lewis unmasks his characters, illustrates that carnival subverts power relations: the king becomes a jester, the powerful become powerless and the monk turns out to be the Devil's accomplice behind his mask. With the final unmasking, the novel's carnival is over and Lewis's critique of the church and its authoritarian and artificial

demands is disclosed. Consequently, the power relations between the church and society in general are altered by the unmasking of the characters.



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