CLAUSTROPHILIA, CLAUSTROPHOBIA AND LOCALE FATALE: THE SPATIAL POETICS OF *THE MONK*

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Abstract: *The publication of The Monk*: A Romance *in 1796, when Matthew Lewis was only twenty-one years old, induced many accusations and controversies from critics on the ground of its obscenity, blasphemy, and equivocal morality, despite the novel's huge success and popularity among the public. As is implied in its subtitle, this early example of the English Gothic genre resorts to medievalism in plot-building, characterization, and spatial construction. The poetics of space in The Monk is permeated with binary oppositions and their intrusion into each other, engendering frequent psychological shifts between claustrophilia and claustrophobia in its characters as well as in the readers. This essay explores the intricate way in which Lewis's spatial construction subverts empirical experience, satirizes religious venues as malfunctioning social units, and fashions locales fatales full of contradictions and ambiguities crucial to the development of the story. It also examines the chiaroscuro with which Lewis portrays the psychology and sexual identity of his female protagonist Matilda, who transcends the gender stereotypes of eighteenth-century British patriarchism and proves to be more than just another exquisite example in the Femme Fatale literary tradition.*

The architectural movement referred to as the Gothic Revival, beginning in the 1740s in England and prospering well into the nineteenth century, has been regarded by some to be no more than a picturesque, if not superficial, part of a broader Medieval Revival, of which the Gothic Revival is one expression among many. "Architecture, then, is merely the best-recognized face of the Medieval Revival, a cultural iceberg with unacknowledged dimensions in literature and in social, political and religious thinking." (Alexander, 2007, xxii) However, a study in the cultural history of taste, even only of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries within the boundaries of the British Isles, would show that the visual scarcely ever stands alone without affecting the psychological propensity of an age and eventually working itself into the quintessential spirit of a literary genre of that age. Church, abbey, cloister, garden grotto, vault, dungeon, among other Gothic locales (the word "Gothic" has largely been replaced, justifiably according to Alexander, by "medieval" since the 1830s), have shaped the mentality of characters and the development of events in *The Monk* (1796) as much as they have outlined the typical medieval landscape as imagined by general lovers of literature in Matthew Lewis's age.

Shortly before Matthew Gregory Lewis, the teenager prodigy, driven by professed "ennui" during a diplomatic service in Holland five years after the outbreak of the French Revolution, started writing *The Monk*, he was reading *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) by his female predecessor Ann Radcliffe,[1] and

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[1] Likewise, Radcliffe read *The Monk* shortly after its publication and was much impressed, to the point that her next novel, *The Italian* (1797), also featuring a monk as its villain protagonist, is on many levels "a reworking of material from *The Monk*, as well as a

described it as "one of the most interesting Books that ever have been published." (Peck，1961, 208-9). During the ten weeks in which he supposedly completed the novel, Lewis probably did not think about his rough contemporary William Blake's swaggeringly confident line: "Grecian Art is Mathematic Form; Gothic is Living Form" (Blake，1966, 778), let alone of John Ruskin, writing around half a century after Lewis and arguably the greatest art critic of the period, who in *The Stones of Venice* sang high praise of Gothic architecture as opposed to the mass-produced, perfectly symmetrical works of the post-Industrial Revolution age. Nevertheless, throughout *The Monk* there is a mesmerizing fetishism of the space –a fascination with deep, narrow, and hollow interiors together with their assorted, elaborate, glittering components – partly inherited by Lewis from Enlightenment antiquarianism and German writings of the *Schauer-Romantik*, passed down into the English Gothic literary tradition pioneered by Radcliffe, and later reincarnated in Romantic poetry such as Coleridge's *Christabel* and Keats' *The Eve of St Agnes*, as well as in the larger part of Tennyson's poetic corpus. Medievalization in *The Monk* often takes the form of parody and caricature. Locales criticized and ridiculed in *The Monk* as malfunctioning social units or as hotbeds of religious and moral hypocrisy are subtly reworked into significant venues of actions and high theatricality, which makes the novel self-reflective in a most unexpected way.

I. Theatricality and Claustrophilia within the Sacred Walls

Throughout *The Monk*, the chief religious space, namely the Church of the Capuchins in Madrid, has never been what it should be. Rather, it is a place to show off the splendor and pomposity of Catholic sacraments, or worse, an overcrowded ballroom for social gathering and flirtation, an elaborately decorated saloon to kill some time in: "The Women came to show themselves, the Men to see the Women…Some came because they had no better means of employing their time till the play began; …and one half of Madrid was brought thither by expecting to meet the other half" (Lewis，2008, 7). In the novel's opening scene, the Church of the Capuchins is a sumptuous theatre when it is not a hurly-burly marketplace, with its altar, lectern, and statues filling in as props or even seats: "Boys suspended themselves upon the wings of Cherubims; St. Francis and St. Mark bore each a spectator on his shoulders; and St. Agatha found herself under the necessity of carrying double." (Ibid., 8) Ambrosio, the monk-abott protagonist and the star of the day, is able to make a remarkable and silence-commanding entrance both by his striking physical appearance (lofty stature, "uncommonly handsome" features, aquiline nose, eyebrows joined together, deep brown complexion) and a gesture too readily reminiscent of a harlequin: "He bowed himself with humility to the audience" (Ibid., 18). As if this is not enough, three lines after the bow, he is solemnly given a surname: "Such was Ambrosio, Abbot of the Capuchins…'The Man of Holiness'" – one can easily imagine a counterpart scene at the curtain-up of a comedy play when the leading actor is fondly given the same nickname, just as Ambrosio's exit after the sermon is

review of her own works in the light of Lewis's novel." See Emma McEvoy, "Introduction," in Howard Anderson ed., *The Monk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. xiii-xiv.

suggestive of a fans gathering at a rock-n-roll concert: "…his rosary…fell from his hand, and dropped among the surrounding multitude. It was seized eagerly, and immediately divided amidst the Spectators. Whoever became possessor of a Bead, preserved it as a sacred relique". (Ibid., 20) Despite the narrator's perfectly serious tone when describing the entering and leaving a church by a revered abbot giving a sermon, the scenes are consistently reminiscent of the entrance and exit by a favorite jester staging a burlesque in a theatre, completing a fluid and double-meaning parallel narration.

Apart from the visual innuendos, audio-wise, as soon as Abbot Ambrosio's sermon begins, the church is further turned into a pageant wagon typically seen in a medieval mystery play: "His voice at once distinct and deep was fraught with all the terrors of the Tempest…Every Hearer looked back upon his past offences, and trembled: The Thunder seemed to roll, whose bolt was destined to crush him, and the abyss of eternal destruction to open before his feet." (Ibid., 19) Back in the Middle Ages, the capacity for pronouncing one's lines sonorously and in an exaggeratedly dramatic way was specifically required in an actor of mystery plays, for he usually had to shout probably from a lofty, tiered wagon over a large noisy crowd to make himself heard. In a blink of the eye, upon Ambrosio's changing to the more pleasant topic of eternal bliss, his auditors immediately "felt their scattered spirit insensibly return…while his full voice swelled into melody, they were transported to those happy regions which He painted to their imaginations in colors so brilliant and glowing." (Ibid., 19) The instantaneous, natural switch from "terrors" to "melody" and skillful maneuvering of the audience's spiritual reaction equally underline a chameleon's gift for camouflage – also a gift of an actor – which would become increasingly indispensable to the development of the Monk's character.

On the conceptual hand, the monastery as a communal habitation for clerics is in itself a locale fatale no less pernicious under Lewis's pen. When the novice Rosario (disguised by Matilda who adores Ambrosio and conceals her gender to approach him) expresses his/her envy for a hermit's absolute solitude, Ambrosio professes his admiration for the monastery institution with the merit of being at the same time alienated from the wide world and operating a microcosm of selected inhabitants within its boundary: "It secludes Man from the temptations of Vice…It spares him the mortification of witnessing the crimes of the worldly, and yet permits him to enjoy the blessings of society…a society composed of the most estimable of Mankind." (Ibid., 54) Reasonable as this argument might sound, monastic seclusion is not at all represented in a positive light throughout *The Monk*. Ambrosio has never been outside the Abbey walls since his arrival there as a baby, some "common people" even believe that he fell from heaven directly into the Abbey as a gift from the Virgin (Ibid., 251). His schizophrenic personality is accounted for as the result of the conflict between education (symbolized by the monastic "Inside") and nature (symbolized by the world "Outside"). As a child, "Inside" and its staff have repressed his natural "grandeur and disinterestedness", "universal benevolence" and "noble frankness" and twisted them into "selfish partiality" and "servile humility，" adopting bleak stories of eternal perdition and superstitions of "colours the most dark, terrible and fantastic" to render him "timid and apprehensive" (Ibid., 237). Even his relentless intolerance towards Agnes' transgression of breaking the vow of chastity, which is largely responsible for her cruel fate in the dungeon, is

explained by the fact that his earlier education of "Inside" teaches "compassion for the errors of Others as a crime of the blackest dye…While the Monks were busied in rooting out his virtues, and narrowing his sentiments, they allowed every vice which had fallen to his share, to arrive at full perfection" (Ibid., 237). Throughout *The Monk*, as a monastery or a cloister's inaccessible lofty walls set geographic boundary on the ground, they also set limits to the inhabitants' psychological development. Physical and mental insularity as a result both of traumatic experience and of acquired claustrophilia only intensifies the potential destructiveness of trespass. The Abbey wall functions in the novel like a fatal sliding door, and once Ambrosio sets his feet upon the "Outside" ground, evil inevitably breaks loose. Ambrosio first breaks the monastic rule on the pretext of visiting Antonia's bed-ridden mother Elvira, which progressively leads to the two women's and his own final ruins. In the spatial reality of *The Monk*, as Maggie Kilgour puts it, "both the monastery and Ambrosio himself are *loci* where opposites are not reconciled but totally set apart…Cloistering becomes a metaphor for the repression of flesh, body, nature (all ultimately reduced to and identified with sexuality), and illusory idealisation of spirit, mind, and art" (Kilgour，1995, 143).

Besides functioning as a cabinet of spectacles (the cognate words "spectacle" and "spectator" constantly reoccur in the church scenes) deprived of its sacred functions, and as a repressing, malevolent Bildungsroman setting, the vaulted, prolongated, shadow-weaving space inside a typical Gothic church can also provide security and tranquillity, a gloomy shelter for a pondering man. As Gaston Bachelard remarks in *The Poetics of Space*, "the gestures that make us conscious of security or freedom are rooted in a profound depth of being. Indeed, it is because of this 'depth' that they become so normally symbolical" (Bachelard， 1964, 224), the depth and narrowness which under some circumstances are so intimidating and unnerving can under others engender feelings of snugness, comfort and relaxing immersion. The cramped grandiosity of the interior of a Gothic church draws the eye to the vertical, either tentatively calls for spiritual sublimation, or seduces one to gravitate right towards the ground and the hidden depth of the crypt, making the church "a serious house on serious earth…proper to grow wise in, if only that so many dead lie round" (Larkin, 1988, 98). In the case of Lorenzo, who has been left alone in the Church of the Capuchins after the high drama of Ambrosio's sermon, the ground enclosed within the sacred walls becomes a parody of a medieval dream vision locale:

> The night was now fast advancing. The Lamps were not yet lighted. The faint beams of the rising Moon scarcely could pierce though the gothic obscurity of the Church. Lorenzo found himself unable to quit the Spot…the melancholy of mind, which accorded but too well with the religious gloom surrounding him. He was still leaning against the seventh column from the Pulpit. 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 tints of light and colours: Universal silence prevailed around, only interrupted by the occasional closing of Doors in the adjoining Abbey…He threw himself upon a seat which stood near him, and abandoned himself to the delusions of his fancy…a thousand changing visions floated before his fancy, sad 'tis true, but not unpleasing. (Lewis, 2008, 26-7)

The picturesque visual effect of the setting, consisting of sharp contrasts of light and darkness, is at the same time highly stimulating and hypnotic. The church interior's translucent chiaroscuro, intensified by an audio effect varying between sound and silence, contributes to build up an enchanting ambience where each spatial feature and architectural detail is metamorphosed into a prop in Lorenzo's first wish-fulfilling, then apocalyptic dream. In his dream vision, Lorenzo witnesses his fancied fiancée Antonia in bridal white harassed by a swarthy "monster" upon the Altar, before ascending to heaven through the cracked Cathedral roof in the accompaniment of harmonious chorus and dazzlingly celestial rays, leaving the Cathedral crumbling into pieces and the Altar sinking into a sulphurous abyss vomiting clouds of flame. Upon awakening and finding himself lying on the pavement, the perplexed Lorenzo gazes into the newly illuminated depth of the Church and listens to the vespers chanted in the Abbey-Chapel. Like most medieval dream vision locales (the garden in *The Golden Targe*, the grassy mound in *Pearl*, the "herber"-maze in *The Assembly of Ladies*, among others), the deceptively serene and soothing interior of the Gothic church is later revealed to be a dangerous limbo between trance and sobriety, between paranoid illusion and prophetic foreboding, promising ecstatic fulfilment at first but turning out to be a bitterly disappointing locale fatale in the end. Lorenzo, the embodiment of enlightened reason instead of religious superstition in the novel, readily dismisses his dream, which will prove to be a surreal synopsis of Antonia's tragic fate at the end of the book.

II. The Barbarous Inside and the Civilized Outside

Mark S. Madoff compares a typical Gothic plot to a locked-room mystery in modern detective fiction, in which the victim is found in a chamber locked from within, leaving no clue as to the weapon or the escape stratagem used by the murderer (the example of Edgar Allen Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* is cited as an early example). As "the relationship between the pain and evil inside the locked room and the seeming normality outside is a maddening challenge to the ingenuity, observation, and deductive skill of the detective," so is the tension between the interior and exterior of a closed space a test for the Gothic hero/heroine, for the Gothic is from its very beginning "full of locked rooms…within its peculiar, involuted architectural space; locked rooms of the mind; locked rooms of history; locked rooms of secret sexual expression" (Madoff, 1989, 49). Madoff further summarizes the Gothic Inside as "ancient, barbaric, disorderly, passionate, indecorous…closed, obscure, exotic and alluring", whereas the Outside "contains those actions and attitudes proudly called modern, civilized, enlightened…is open, obvious, familiar and unsatisfying in its simplicity and rationality" (Madoff, 1989, 51). Strange as it may seem from the perspective of empirical spatial experience, where it is usually the Inside that is cultivated, civilized, and tamed by human intellect and rationality, leaving the uncharted Outside at the mercy of Nature and primitivism, of supernatural and agnostic powers – the barbarous Outside, so to speak– this binary opposition is literally reverted "inside- out" in the realm of Gothic literature, a reversion intelligible enough if one chooses to view the rise of the genre itself as a revolutionary and subversive force against the Enlightenment Zeitgeist of the age. Marquis de Sade, an ardent admirer of Lewis, in 1800 accounted for the

popularity of *The Monk* and other contemporary Gothic novels partly by the terror of the French Revolution "which all of Europe has suffered" – in an era as dark as this, Sade explained, the old novels "became as difficult to write as monotonous to read," while to write a piece that would hold interest "one had to call upon the aid of hell itself." (Sade, 1991, 108) If everything is upside down and distorted in hell, the arabesque, grotesque, and highly "artificial" genre of the Gothic would indeed have done its job properly with a reversed sense of dimension and space.

Nevertheless, in the spatial poetics of Gothic novels, the division of the cruel, barbarous, chaotic, and treacherous Inside from the safe, civilized, orderly, and rational Outside can also be understood as foreshadowing latent indignation, which would only reach its full ripeness in post-industrial writers like Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin, against the crimes committed by civilization and industrialization upon Nature and the pastoral ideal of a "former age." In a world menaced with civilization and its discontents, the over-cultivated and manipulated Inside becomes the dangerous new Beast.

Throughout *The Monk*, the half-enclosed garden shared by the Capuchins Cathedral and the Convent of St. Clare is a typical locale fatale where crucial plots happen, changing the characters' fates once and for all, as well as a "point of epiphany" (to borrow Northrop Frye's term), where mind-blowing discoveries are made. It is in the garden that Ambrosio first found out the novice Rosario's true gender --"I am a Woman!" professed Rosario-Matilda "in faltering accents" (Lewis, 2008, 58); it is at the door of the garden grotto that Ambrosio is bitten by a venomous Cientipedoro and would have died but for Matilda's self-sacrifice, the bounding power of which only leads to the Monk's ruin in the end; it is at the garden gate at 12 o'clock that Raymond intends to meet Agnes and elope with her; it is within the garden that Agnes loses her virginity "in an unguarded moment " to Raymond, who professes that "the honour of Agnes was sacrificed to my passion"(Ibid., 186); it is also the western side of the same garden that leads to the cemetery overgrown with yew trees, which in turn leads to the underground sepulchre and dungeons with their hidden, dark secrets.

Ironically, the *hortus conclusus* (enclosed garden) in medieval allegorical poems is usually an idyllic, enchanting and tranquil *locus amoenus* promising erotic adventure, pleasure and comfort.[2] The lord of the garden in the Old French *Le Roman de la Rose* is none other than Pleasure himself, and the garden or "herber" in the Middle English *The Assembly of Ladies* is a botanical labyrinth, amid the crossed alleys of which the gentlewomen take their leisurely walk on a drowsy afternoon. Here in *The Monk*, too, the abbey garden first appears an orderly, harmonious and perfectly harmless earthly paradise, a shelter from the turmoil of the outside world, an Inside within the Inside (the Abbey):

> In all Madrid there was no spot more beautiful or better regulated. It was laid out with the most exquisite taste; The choicest flowers adorned it in the height of luxuriance, and though artfully arranged, seemed only planted by the hand of Nature: Fountains, springing from the basins of white Marble, cooled the air with perpetual showers; and the Walls were entirely covered by Jessamine, vines, and Honeysuckles…The full Moon ranging through a blue and cloudless sky, shed upon the trees a trembling lustre, and the waters of the fountains

[2] For the garden as *locus amoenus* (place of pleasure), see Ernst Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), Chapter X.

> sparkled in the silver beam: A gentle breeze breathed the fragrance of Orange-blossoms along the Alleys; and the Nightingale poured forth her melodious murmur from the shelter of an artificial wilderness. (Ibid., 50)

This abbey garden is portrayed as an unsteady equilibrium between nature and art, or in Lewis's words, "an artificial wilderness," which would soon turn out to be the gateway to real, rioting, implacable psychological wilderness. Although the garden is an Inside enclosed by the walls of the Abbey, it is at the same time the Outside, for unlike the Church interior and the cells in which the monks dwell, or the completely secluded underground sepulchre, the abbey garden is partially exposed in the open air, its link with the Outside not completely cut loose. It is in this ambiguous grey zone that what is initially sought as the comfort of claustrophilia will eventually metamorphosize into the horror of claustrophobia.

Above the ground level of the Abbey, as in a set of Russian dolls, the Inside has a threefold structure: the church, the garden within, and the grotto within the garden "formed in imitation of an Hermitage." As if this is not obvious enough, a marble tablet is fixed on the grotto wall, on which is engraved a poem called "Inscription in an Hermitage":

> For well I saw in Halls and Towers t
> That Lust and Pride,
> The Arch-Fiend's dearest darkest Powers,
> In state preside.
> …In this lone Cave, in garments lowly,
> Alike a Foe to noisy folly,
> And brow-bent gloomy melancholy
> I wear away
> My life, and in my office holy
> Consume the day.
> Content and comfort bless me more in
> This Grot, than e'er I felt before in
> A Palace; and with thoughts still soaring
> To God on high,
> Each night and morn with voice imploring
> This wish I sigh. (Ibid., 51-2)

It is in this innermost Inside with a most serene landscape (walls constructed of roots of trees; interstices of walls covered with moss and ivy; a natural cascade falling incessantly) that the love-struck Matilda seeks resort from the Outside as well as from her inner emotional tribulations: "What a blessing would Misanthropy be to me!" (Ibid., 51) But it is also in this grotto that a moment later, after she confesses her true gender to the Monk, she exposes her 'beauteous Orb" under the darting moon beam, which for the first time in his life arouses Ambrosio to full sexual awareness, another point of epiphany, so to speak. "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." (Ibid., 65) Wilderness breaks loose. Tempest rules. The secure harbour becomes a fatal trap impossible to escape from.

III. The Janus-faced Femme Fatale and the Threshold as Locale Fatale

During their second meeting at the garden grotto, Ambrosio commands the potential seductress Matilda, who up to this point only entreats to be allowed to remain Rosario by his side in order to love him virtuously as a brother, to quit the abbey forever to save their souls from carnal temptations. After many futile implorations and tears, Matilda agrees to leave on the condition that Ambrosio grants her a last wish: to pluck a rose planted at the door of the grotto for her as a remembrance, a request innocent enough if we do not at the end of the book come to the knowledge that Rosario-Matilda has been the agent of Lucifer himself from the very beginning. Ambrosio consents and approaches the rose bush at the threshold of the grotto and is stung by the Cientipedoro: "I have received my death!...Concealed among the Roses…A Serpent…" (Ibid., 71) This event turns out to change the whole story once and for all. From that point, the powers of hell break loose, and the impeccable, virtuous Monk embarks on the irreversible, one-way journey to vice, morbidity, and eternal perdition.

The gender of Matilda, the Gothic Femme Fatale inhabiting the locale fatale, is also portrayed as fluid but potentially subversive, double-faced, and transcending boundaries, just like a door. Through the classical device of transvestism, Lewis explores the contradictions and complexities in Matilda's sexual identity as they are reflected in Ambrosio's reactions. Ambrosio's utter fear of female sexuality and self-agency is representative of the gender stereotypes of eighteenth-century British patriarchal society: the ideal woman must be docile, ready to please, "devoted to his will, and looking up to him as a superior Being" (Ibid., 231). Ambrosio can only love Matilda back when she manifests those expected feminine virtues, even when disguised as Rosario, the boy whom Ambrosio affectionately remembered as "the fond, the gentle, and submissive," while he can have little sympathy with Matilda's unveiled true nature which aspires to male independence and agency: "He grieved, that Matilda preferred the virtue of his sex to those of her own…He could not help blaming them as cruel and unfeminine". (Ibid., 232) Ironically, "masculine" gender qualities are only assigned to the androgynous Femme Fatale when she gets rid of her physical masculine camouflage, as Matilda, the once "mildest and softest of her sex," now "assumed a sort of courage and manliness in her manners and discourse but ill-calculated to please him. She spoke no longer to insinuate, but command: he found himself unable to cope with her in argument, and was unwillingly obliged to confess the superiority of her judgment." (Ibid., 231-32) Ambrosio's horror at Matilda's transformation in character echoes the general social patriarchism of Lewis' age, permeated with anxiety over female authority. Transcending both binary gender expectations and the archetype of the fatal enchantress, Matilda proves to be one of the most richly developed female protagonists in the English Gothic corpus.

If Matilda's character has the face of Janus, there are still more real, dangerous doors facing both directions in *The Monk* which pose threats, introduce the unknown, or forecast doom. In Lewis's brilliant rewriting of the Gothic stock episode of the Bleeding Nun, the function of the Portal in Lindenberg Castle cannot be overestimated. It is the ancient custom of the Castle to leave the Portal-door open at a particular hour on a particular day to let the ghost of the Bleeding

Nun pass as a token of respect for "the dignity of her Ghost-ship" (Ibid., 141), though it is a strange idea that a ghost cannot easily penetrate a closed door. In one of their many unsuccessful elopements, Raymond holds his breath near the Castle, waiting for Agnes, now disguised as the Bleeding Nun, to pass through the Portal into his arms: the moment he sees the ghost reaching the Portal, he is convinced of their success and flies to clasp "Agnes" in his arms, who is later found out to be the real Bleeding Nun. When the Bleeding Nun visits Raymond at the inn near Ratisbon after midnight at one o'clock sharp, his chamber door is always "thrown open with violence," promptly ushering in the "solemn measured steps" of the ghost approaching his bed, and it is always at the moment of entrance that the long accumulating horror of the victim reaches the climax (Ibid., 159). In another famous ghost-visiting episode, when Antonia sees the apparition of her murdered mother Elvira in the latter's former bedroom, a long and elaborate passage is given to describe the entrance of the ghost through the door, by which the terror of anticipating the unknown is built up incrementally:

> Yet the Bolt She knew to be fastened…Presently the Latch was lifted up softly, and the Door moved with caution backwards and forwards…Scarcely had She reached the middle of the room, when the Latch was lifted up a second time…Slowly and gradually the Door turned upon its hinges, and standing upon the Threshold She beheld a tall thin Figure, wrapped in a white shroud which covered it from head to foot. (Ibid., 317)

It is classic Gothic narration, in which the door imagery routinely serves as the threshold, both physical and psychological, between innocence and experience, between the knowledgeable and the unfathomable, and between enlightened rationality and revolutionary horror. In this light, the door can be considered a spatial metaphor of the Gothic genre itself. *The Monk* abounds with other transgression plots with one sort or another door imagery at the centre: the iron railing leading to the half of the cemetery that belongs to the Convent of St. Clare; the sunken door "within the hollow of a wall, and almost concealed by thick festoons of ivy hanging over it" leading to the sepulchre of the Sisterhood (Ibid., 229); the door of Antonia's bedroom which the lust-driven Monk opens with a magic myrtle lent from the Devil, to name but a few. As can be seen in the examples above, the transgression, the stepping over the threshold never comes without a cost. Even a transgression of the eye has a penalty to pay, as is seen in Theodore's made-up story of how he has lost his left eye through a peep at the naked statue of the Virgin (Ibid., 286), a variant of the Peeping Tom motif later famously captured in Tennyson's poem *Godiva*.

The only exception to the rule of the threshold is the stock character known by the name of the Wandering Jew, inherited and adapted by Lewis from Friedrich Schiller's *Der Geisterseher* (1789) and Christian Friedrich Schubart's *Der Ewige Jude* (1787), among other possible German sources. In *The Monk*, the Wandering Jew always enters a room barely noticed, and there is no mention of the door and all the fuss that has been made about it as with other characters at all. The Jew is portrayed by Lewis as neither alive nor dead, neither ghost nor devil, an unaccountable, ambiguous, unique creature forever locked within a limbo where the dimensions of both time and space have melted away: "Fate obliges me to be constantly in movements: I am not permitted to pass more than a fortnight in the same place…Death eludes me, and flies from my embrace."

(Ibid., 169) It is perhaps the Jew's exceptional ever-moving fluidity (even the unsubstantial ghost of the Bleeding Nun finally finds a place to rest after Raymond has deposited her mouldering bones in the family vault of the ancestral Andalusian Castle), and his being the embodiment of everything that is in the middle, that permits him to travel freely between Inside and Outside, an ability not even possessed by the ghosts in *The Monk*, and to penetrate barriers without incurring misfortunes.

The poetics of space in *The Monk* is fundamentally one of the binary oppositions and their intrusion into each other. What starts with psychological claustrophilia easily transforms into claustrophobia. The two gruesome dungeon episodes near the end of the novel, experienced respectively by Agnes and Antonia, would keep encroaching into the darkest and most untellable nightmares of generations of writers: Edgar Allen Poe is among its most eminent victims when he wrote *Premature Burial* and several other stories collected in *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840). Though the melodramatic plot device of sending a heroine alive into the tomb through a narcotic potion in order to effect a crucial twist of event, among many other such devices, had long been exploited by Shakespeare and other master predecessors to the point of almost being reduced to formulaic cliché, the hair-splitting claustrophobic ambience is unique to Lewis, which he brings to full effect particularly in the imprisonment of Agnes in a dungeon within a "gulph" underneath the pedestal of a statue of St. Clare, which is in its turn hidden in the depth of the sepulchre-labyrinth underneath the cemetery within the Abbey wall –a many-folded and hopeless locale fatale indeed. There the chained Agnes is left to starve beside the corpse of her newly born baby: the impenetrable Inside with its elaborate system of torture machinery is an ill-cultivated place where art, symbolised by the statue of St. Clare, "is used as a tool of mystification…associated with oppression, superstition, and blind idolatry, and is used as a means of keeping us from discovering the dark and decadent truth that lurks below" (Kilgour, 1995, 143).

The metamorphosis of one type of spatial metaphor into another often happens at what the author has termed a "locale fatale," which is in itself an embodiment of contradictory qualities and a battleground between lights and shadows, such as the interior of a cathedral, a garden, and a grotto. On the other hand, the crucial trespass that drastically alters the narration usually happens at a more specific "point of epiphany," for instance, a castle portal, a chamber door, a statue that has a lidded pedestal, and many other Janus-faced objects splitting spatial dimensions. Above all, the principle of fluidity rules throughout the novel, mediating the many different pairs of binary oppositions and helping us to grasp the psychological gist of the Gothic better, both as an antiquarian taste relishing the imagined medieval past and as a revived architectural style, the latter skilfully described and reconstructed by Lewis in order to give shape to the former.

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