The early Gothic, the Classics and Ovidian Echoes in Matthew G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1796)

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Abstract:

A controversial and ambiguous novel, Lewis's work features dramatic situations that are still shocking and appalling even for a modern public. The text is complex and mingles multiple sources and influences, creating a pastiche effect inherited from Horace Walpole's Castle of Otranto (1764) and William Beckford's Vathek (1786). Vast and challenging critical literature has been published on Lewis's novel providing various interpretations and identifying models for his work. However, lesser attention has been paid to tracing classical inspiration and identifying elements of antiquity. My claim is that Latin Antiquity and Classical sources had no small part in the genesis of the early Gothic novel and of Lewis's The Monk. Ovid's Metamorphoses in particular seem to have played an essential role in Lewis's Gothic creation. This study intends to highlight the classical matrix and the Ovidian factor in the development of the most crucial parts of the novel and how classical influences still had a very important role in poetic and literary production at the end of the eighteenth century.

Key words: Gothic Novel – Matthew G. Lewis – Latin Antiquity – Ovid – *The Metamorphoses*

Published at the end of the eighteenth century, *The Monk*[1] is a problematic and ambivalent novel that reflects multiple

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[1] Matthew Gregory Lewis, *The Monk* (1796; Oxford and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as [TM]. The present article is part of

cultural influences. In this article, I intend to present less evident but extremely important elements to detect less explored sources. My intention is to discuss Lewis's work to demonstrate that among the multiple images and themes that can be identified in its development, it is possible to discover traits that are connected to Latin Antiquity. The peculiarity of the text, which was and still is the object of different and opposing critical points of view, starting from its anonymous publication in 1796, resides in its unusual and multifaceted contents, liable to be interpreted in several ways. Lewis published his novel when he was only twenty years old. Most scholars agree that he was particularly precocious, but although the intensity of his literary activity was high during his teens, he was never able to replicate the success and originality of his first literary exploit. His later dramatic production was interesting, but was generally based on Gothic clichés as he explained in a letter to Walter Scott: "A ghost or a witch is a *sine qua non* ingredient in all the dishes of which I mean to compose my hobgoblin repast" (Louis F. Peck, 118). At the time of its publication, Lewis's novel created an uproar of fervent protests against its crude and shocking representation of violence, sexuality and incest. Its excessive graphic imagery mixed with "libertine discourse [was] scandalous because it addressed a wide and indiscriminate audience, including many young women" (Markman Ellis 115). If the young clergyman and head-master Vicesimus Knox, in his *Essays Moral and Literary* published in 1778, had claimed that the novels of well-established writers such as Richardson, Smollett, and Fielding had probably contributed to the "degeneracy of the age" (W.F. Gallaway, 1042), we may well imagine his feelings of outrage and those of the reading public, with the publication of Lewis's novel only two decades later. Even though the high doses of

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a doctoral thesis on Classical influences on the early Gothic novels by William Beckford, Ann Radcliffe, and Matthew Lewis.

sexual desire in [TM] may seem a novelty, it is true that stories with erotic potential had preceded Lewis's novel, with tragic achievements in Richardson, or humorously gross results in Fielding. Toni Bowers analyses the different forms of sexual transgressions in what she defines as "Tory novels of seduction", which include Richardson's *Clarissa.* (157). It is necessary to highlight that the creativity and literary technique shown in [TM] were by far superior to the stylistics of both sentimental novels and contemporary popular novels. The insistence on lustful details, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge emphasized in his analysis of Lewis's text, offended contemporary readers' sensibility. Coleridge's study appeared in *The Critical Review*, one year after the book had been printed for the first time.[2] While despising the waves of publications written in imitation of Schauerromane[3], Coleridge was aware of Lewis's great literary qualities and appreciated the author's vivid imagination especially in certain parts of the novel. Coleridge admired the secondary plots of the Erring Jew and the Bleeding Nun, because they were examples of a great imaginative quality, elegantly expressed. Michael Gamer claims that Thomas James Mathias' accusations of indecency against Lewis had significant consequences. Mathias, who was the royal librarian as well as a literary critic, focused his hyperbolic accusations on Lewis by defining him a pernicious example for society because of his political role as member of Parliament, and compared him to the "shameful" John Cleland (1709-1789), introducing a tendency to identify Lewis with his negative protagonist, a fact that is equally highlighted by Emma Clery (164). It is not clear whether the identification with the negative hero was voluntary or accidental. Lewis's first biographer, Margaret Baron Wilson identifies the problem

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[2] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Review of *The Monk,* by Matthew G. Lewis," *Critical Review* 19 (1797): 194-200.
[3] See: Maurice Lévy (345); Maggie Kilgour (14); James Watt (92). For a general discourse on Lewis and [TM] see: David Punter (1996).

in the fact that Lewis usually signed all his correspondence as M. G. Lewis, leading people to think that M. stood for Monk and not for Matthew, as very few people knew his real name (I: 185). As Robert D. Hume claimed in his essay on the apparent clash between the Gothic and Romanticism, Lewis "attacks [his readers] frontally with events that shock and disturb [them]" using a method that was exploited by Beckford before him, and was later used by Mary Shelly and Charles Maturin (285). Hume claims that Lewis was not interested, like Walpole or Radcliffe, in simply maintaining an atmosphere of suspense.

In spite of his obscure origins and "the mystery which conceals his birth" (TM 17), Ambrosio, the central figure of the novel corresponding to the title-character, becomes the Abbot of the Capuchin Monastery in Madrid. His austerity is admired and revered and his sermons, morally intense and full of rhetoric and pathos, attract huge congregations. The novel starts during one of his famous speeches when other important characters that are instrumental in the plot, such as Antonia and Lorenzo, meet for the first time. Puzzling and enigmatic, either a puppet in the hands of demonic forces, or a cruel hypocrite, Ambrosio's progressive pathological behaviours, which completely metamorphose his original self, have been seen in psychoanalytical terms. Dale Townshend highlights both Freudian and Lacanian aspects in his distorted personality. The monk's obscure relationship with power, patriarchy and violence has often called into question a Foucauldian stance for analysis, which characterize the critical analyses by Eve Kosofsky, Robert Miles, and Barry Doyle whereas Derrida, Starobinski and Baudrillard's theories have been used by Jerrold Hogle and Jesse Molesworth to demonstrate the intermingling of both obsolete and original narrative models in anticipation of post-modernism. The first dark hero in Kilgour's opinion (144), Ambrosio, does not leave any reader indifferent because he cannot be easily deciphered. Sue Chaplin considers Lewis to be the initiator of terror with

his explicit descriptions of "death and degradation and replete with abject material detail" (44). There is, however, no general agreement on the fact that Ambrosio is the first negative hero. David L. Macdonald, claims that Ambrosio is but the embodiment of the cruel Lovelace, *Clarissa's* dark protagonist. In Peter Brooks's words, he is like "the man coming out of the Enlightenment and its process of desacralization. He is the one who has to find spiritualism once more but the divinity he finds fills him with fear and anguish" (252). Elisabeth Napier's analysis stresses the complexity of [TM]*:* At first the text seems to declare that "moral impetus of the novel is that of unmasking, of exposing, and revealing" but the text actually develops in parallel with "images (…) of veiling and distancing" (113, 115) that are confusing and do not allow the reader to determine the actual truth of the story. One interesting narratological aspect is that Lewis never allows the reader to observe the scene from other characters' perspectives when Ambrosio is involved. Some characters' real nature is an enigma that can never be fully understood.

Lewis originally introduces parallel plots and subplots to make his story more complicated. The clues that the author provides concerning his work are equally misleading and do not specify sources clearly, but the literary universe from which Lewis borrowed ideas to write [TM] is complex and variegated. The apparently frivolous beginning of the novel might superficially recall the typical theatrical *incipit* in pre-revolutionary comedies by Alain-Réné Lesage (1668-1747) or Pierre Marivaux (1688-1763). The story by Jacques Cazotte (1719-1792), *Le Diable Amoureux* (1772), based on fantastic events, presents an amazingly similar context to Lewis's work. As far as erotic publications, Grantham Turner interestingly explains that "the eighteenth-century novel should be placed within a complex network of clandestine reading, looking, and reporting" (216), a definition that seem suitable for [TM], a novel containing high doses of eroticism that is frequently

turned into horror in all protagonists' amorous stories. Generally described as both the typical Gothic and the atypical Gothic novel, Lewis's work is characterized by a refined cultural mélange.

When we analyse Lewis's novel we generally consider that it developed in a period when writers and poets alike tried to break with tradition and were trying to give voice to new forms of literature. However, in the changing flux of history and literature, scholars in Europe and in Britain had steadily exalted the importance of Antiquity, which could be appreciated in the original form or in translations during all the decades of the eighteenth century. Translations of one same classical work were made by different writers. Translating had been common in the previous centuries and continued being popular during the eighteenth century contributing to cultural dissemination of the Classics. Dryden, Pope and other writers' translations of Latin antiquity were steadily read throughout the century. Stuart Gillespie and David Hopkins argue that despite its general anonymity "the activity of translation is quite expressly the animating power in the English poetic tradition, and the decisive influence in canon-formation" (14-15). They also claim that literary translations determined the progress of culture by introducing both the known and the unknown. Adam Rounce posits that texts such as Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* (1779-1781) and *Works of the English Poets, from Chaucer to Cowper* provide evidence of the plethora of British poets' literary translations, which had a "profound influence on the embryonic English novel" (327). Recent critical analyses have encountered difficulties separating the neoclassical Augustan age, the Enlightenment, the Gothic and Romanticism. Traditional delimitations of the various literary waves are becoming less clear-cut insofar as research progresses and discovers new unexpected analogies between authors that originally seemed incompatible. Imagination, which was both a philosophical development and an inheritance from the Ancient

Classics, actually dominated the eighteenth century. Therefore it was not a prerogative of the Romantic period. I would argue that the Gothic was one of the most evident consequences of that latent passion for mystery, which was however imbued with Classicism. The British Augustan Age and the French Enlightenment brought about new scientific, philosophical, cultural, and literary masterpieces but at the same time promoted the appreciation of great works belonging to Antiquity and to other periods such the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, which were thought of as an ideal era, without the distinctions that were determined during the nineteenth century.[4]

That classical inspiration was essential for writing was reiterated by various authors and essayists of the time. A few decades before the publication of *The Monk*, William Duff underlined that "It is likewise to be observed that we regard the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as works of genius, not only because there appears an astonishing display of Imagination in the invention of characters and incidents in those admired productions, but also because that imagination is regulated by the nicest judgment" (24). Lewis's work intrinsically reveals that classical learning had a preponderant weight and his borrowings from Classical and Latin literature could have been easily perceived, if contemporary readers and critics' attention had not been focused on the novel's scandalous contents, a perspective which later moulded much of the critical literature on Lewis. The first lines of [TM] are in Latin, a rhetorical convention used during the Augustan period: "Somnia, terrors, magicos, miracula, fagas nocturnas, lemures, portentaque" [TM 1]: the author warns that nightmares, terrors, magic, miracles, apparitions, ghosts, and other strange events are to be found in the story. Subsequently, Lewis inserts a poem in English in imitation of Horace's style as a prologue to introduce the story

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[4] In his essay on Renaissance, Jo Tollebeek demonstrates how the classification of historical periods is actually an artificial practice.

[TM 3-4]. This kind of dedication, fashionable among Latin poets and inherited by the Augustans, generally expressed a desire for a good reception and represented an excuse for the possible flaws in the work. The focus of Lewis's introductory poem is about the effects on the public and the future of his book. The conclusion is a request for forgiveness in consideration of his young age. Choosing Horace may not be coincidental, as the Latin poet was an important cultural reference, especially appreciated for his satirical tones and his impeccable stylistic elegance. I would claim that mentioning Horace was both a rhetorical device and a strategy that Lewis uses to be included among other more mature and renowned writers.

However, Ovid seems the poet that mostly dominates in various situations in the story. Anne Williams demonstrates how the Latin poet's pervasive presence can be traced in Alexander Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard*. Various works belonging to the eighteenth century and before show both Ovidian and classical echoes. Interestingly, references to Ovid in [TM] are not as explicit as in Richardson's *Clarissa*. Douglas Murray underlines that Richardson's characters are compared to gods, goddesses and mythological characters from *The Metamorphoses*[5] on various occasions. He also claims that the level of propagation of classicism was so strong that even Richardson "an author without a sufficient knowledge of the Classics [was able] to join modern experience to ancient stories (…), developed a high degree of cultural literacy from reading, printing, theatre-going, and conversation. Prints caricatures, and book illustrations provided him with traditional iconographic images. *Clarissa* itself contains ample evidence of Richardson's knowledge of classical mythology, mostly in the letters of Lovelace, who compares himself to a formidable list of Olympians". Murray explains that "when in *Clarissa* Richardson represented sexual struggles between the powerful

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[5] Henceforward cited parenthetically in the text as [METMO].

and the powerless, he borrowed and adapted characters, situations, and meaning from the culturally approved treatments of the theme: the numerous Greek and Roman accounts of a god raping, or attempting to rape a mortal".[6] Murray claims that even *Pamela* (1740) contains a strong influence from Ovid and the young protagonist might be a metaphor of Psyche, the girl who is first loved by Cupid, and then becomes a godhead herself. Pamela's social ascension is comparable to a mythological apotheosis.

Unlike Richardson, Lewis is more secretive about his sources and does not use clear similes but inserts the mythological context in subtle ways. Although it is not easily detectable, classical presence is pervasive. Various episodes in the novel contain contexts and characters that have their equivalent in Ovid's [METMO]. Intriguingly, these episodes mostly concern Ambrosio. A very important Ovidian moment can be found when Ambrosio starts admiring the beautiful image of a Madonna, decorating the wall of his cell: the image seems to be smiling at him [TM 40-41]. The moment of adoration is religious but turns into a pagan form of exaltation through the process of *ekphrasis*, which is instrumental to Ambrosio's sexual exaltation. The definition of *ekphrasis* given by Philip Hardie incorporates a double structure involving what he calls "absent presence". The first level creates the illusion of presence thanks to the power of the visual arts. The second level "tests the writer's power" who creates the illusion of an illusion (173). Hardie examines the trope in [METMO], in the episodes of Narcissus and Pygmalion, two characters that admire and love simulacrums of beautiful beings. While admiring the sacred painting in his cell, Lewis's Ambrosio would like the image to materialize into a real human being. Ambrosio's desire had been similarly uttered by Pygmalion in [METMO] when he was standing in adoration of the beautiful statue he had just sculpted. Dryden's translation of Ovid

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[6] Both quotations are in Murray, 116.

highlights the virginal aspect of the statue created and then loved by Pygmalion: "Pleas'd with his Idol: he commends, admires, adores; and last, the Thing ador'd, desires. A very Virgin in her Face was seen, and has She mov'd a living Maid had been: One would have thought she cou'd have stirr'd, but strove with Modesty, and was asham'd to move" [METMO I: 166]. Dryden's translation of the description of the statue resonates with the image of the Madonna in the painting that Ambrosio admires for her virginal modesty, an attribute that can be found both in Matilda and Antonia.[7] Even more extraordinary, the monk obtains what he was intimately asking for. When Ambrosio implores God to make the painting real, the door of his cell opens and Rosario-Matilda appears. When the girl finally shows her face, Ambrosio is bewildered as she is the Madonna's perfect embodiment. The result of the religious man's latent erotic raving in front of the Renaissance image is the appearance of a real human being, embodied in the fake novice Rosario, Matilda's alias. The tempting image seems to materialize out of the frame to assume the form of a perturbingly beautiful woman. Undoubtedly, Lewis reproduces Pygmalion's story, narrated in the tenth book of Ovid's work, by adding a deeper level of incertitude.[8] Like Ambrosio, Pygmalion is disgusted and offended by women's licentiousness. Therefore he prefers living alone without a wife:

[7] Matilda is introduced in the story as the mysterious novice Rosario, who becomes a sort of silent assistant to the monk. The novice unveils the truth about her identity when she seduces Ambrosio. The shy and innocent Antonia is the first character to be introduced at the beginning of the novel when the dark protagonist is about to pronounce his sermon. She is a model of modesty and purity and Ambrosio falls in love with her, ignoring that they are brother and sister.
[8] Lewis actually inlays the episode in a context of ambiguous personation. Ironically, the fake novice Rosario enters the monk's cell seconds after Ambrosio has implored God to transform the beautiful Madonna into a real creature. The novice turns out to be the stunning Matilda, who is a perfect copy of the painting. However, she is also a puzzling presence. William D.Brewer, among others, argues that Matilda's ambiguity is connected with transvestism, a further aspect that confirms the characters' different facets and the novel's multiple layers.

> Pygmalion, loathing their lascivious life,
> Abhorre'd all womankind, but most a wife;
> So single chose to live, and shunn'd to wed,
> Well pleased to want a consort of his bed;
> Yet fearing idleness, the nurse of ill,
> In sculpture exercised his happy skill,
> And carved in ivory such a maid, so fair,
> As nature could not with his art compare,
> Were she to work; but in her own defence,
> Must take her pattern here, and copy hence [II: 17, 343-350]

Pygmalion shows a form of misogyny, which is shared by Ambrosio on several occasions. Whereas Ambrosio admires the imaginary woman in the painting, he despises all the other ones. His words suggests a latent hate for women: "What charms me, when ideal and considered as a superior Being, would disgust me, become a Woman and tainted with all the failings of Mortality" [TM 41]. Similarly, by rejecting the company of women that he despises, Pygmalion dedicates himself to art and sculpture and lives in a sort of monastic seclusion. However, he creates a statue of such ethereal and superior beauty that he falls in love with it. While embracing its white perfect body, kissing its inanimate lips and touching its sensuous breast and limbs, Pygmalion prays the Goddess Venus for a miracle. He would like the statue to become a real woman. Most of all, he would like the statue to love him.

> Pleased with his idol, he commends, admires,
> Adores, and last, the thing adored desires:
> A very virgin in her face was seen,
> And had she moved, a living maid had been:
> One would have thought she could have stirr'd, but strove
> With modesty, and was ashamed to move:
> Art hid with art, so well perform'd the cheat,
> It caught the carver with his own deceit. [METMO II: 17, 351-359]

The passage presents some interesting points. Pygmalion may be interpreted here as Ambrosio's antecedent as the sculptor lives the secluded life of a hermit. Moreover, he rejects the company of all women. Art preserves his purity and does not allow vice to become part of his life. In the same way, Ambrosio dedicates himself to religion and to intellectual activities in the monastery. The difference lies in the fact that he has not painted the image he loves, but has received it as a mysterious gift. The statue that Pygmalion creates is characterized by two special aspects: one is supreme beauty, and the other is modesty. These two characteristics can be found in the beautiful Matilda and in the sweet Antonia respectively. It is as if Pygmalion's statue is embodied in the two different, equally marvellous entities that cannot be united in a single person, creating a clash in Ambrosio's psyche. The monk loves the image in the painting and wants to see it come to life and prays God to make his desire come true. What Ambrosio exclaims is similar to Pygmalion's words and the desire he feels for the statue:

He fixed his eyes upon a picture of the Virgin, which was suspended opposite to him: This for two years had been the Object of his increasing wonder and adoration. He paused, and gazed upon it with delight. What beauty is in the countenance?' (…) 'How graceful is the Turn of that head! What sweetness, yet what majesty in her divine eyes! How softly her cheek reclines upon her hand! Can the Rose vie with the blush of that cheek? Can the Lily rival the whiteness of the hand? 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! [TM], 40-41.

The pagan Pygmalion addresses his prayer to the goddess of love whereas the religious Ambrosio implores his Christian God to satisfy his pagan adoration of an idol:

Pygmalion offering first approach'd the shrine,
And then with prayers implored the power divine:

> Almighty gods, if all we mortals want,
> If all we can require, be yours to grant,
> Make this fair statue mine, he would have said,
> But changed the words for shame, and only pray'd,
> "Give me the likeness of my ivory maid." [METMO II: 18, 392-8].

The analogy between the two invocations is remarkable and it may be argued that Lewis had Ovid's story in mind when he was writing Ambrosio's adoring sentences. However, the novel is drastically ambivalent as it includes Matilda's disturbing *double-face* character, whose gender ambivalence makes her character unique and intriguing.[9] Later on, Ambrosio observes Matilda's ivory hand. Lewis reiterates the impressive similarity with Ovid's version, where Pygmalion adores the perfect whiteness of his statue: "his heart throbbed with desire, while his hand was pressed gently by Matilda's ivory fingers". [TM 62]. The image of the pure and transparent colour is repeated various times. After Ambrosio tries to reject her, Matilda threatens to commit suicide. It is on that occasion that she uncovers her breast and "The Moon-beams darting full upon it, enabled the Monk to observe its dazzling whiteness" [65]. Matilda's body seems to retain the beautiful ivory whiteness, previously observed by Ambrosio in the Madonna image, which coincidentally corresponds to the complexion of Pygmalion's statue. Ambrosio's discovery of Matilda's body is a slow process. First he sees her hand and then her breast, but he cannot see her face yet. His exalted religious adoration slowly turns into a pagan cult. At night "The image of his favourite Madona" appears in his sleep. What happens during the monk's unconscious state seems perfectly to reproduce Pygmalion's experience with his statue: "He pressed his lips to hers, and

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[9] Matilda is a sort of first manifestation of the painting for her astounding beauty, the whiteness of her body recalling Pygmalion's perfect marble statue. Antonia is a further manifestation of the idealized Madonna, and consequently of Pygmalion's masterpiece. Her beauty seems to be divine and or mythical, but it is her innocence that mostly attracts the monk.

found them warm: The animated form started from the Canvas, embraced him affectionately, and his senses were unable to support delight so exquisite" [67]. In the following days Ambrosio discovers Matilda's "coral lips" and "a Chin in whose dimples seemed to lurk a thousand Cupids". Playing the harp, she uncovers an arm, "the delicacy of whose skin might have contended with snow in whiteness" [78]. Then the revelation is complete when Matilda's cowl falls back and Ambrosio can admire her face: "Her features became visible to the Monk's inquiring eye. What was his amazement at beholding the exact resemblance of his admired Madona?" [81].

Pygmalion's story is one of the few with a happy ending in Ovid where the couple has no apparent obstacles. Considering the figure of Matilda we can observe that she is the only character left untouched by the tragic events of the novel. In the end, she mysteriously disappear, conveying the idea she might be an infernal agent. However, it is not possible to exclude that Matilda may be a figment of Ambrosio's imagination, who actually continues fantasizing in front of the mysterious painting.[10] Matilda seems to represent the metamorphosis of the work of art into a human being. We might say that part of Ambrosio's story in relation with Matilda is actually Ovid's Pygmalion's myth revisited.

Further Ovidian moments can be traced in the novel. One is a crucial episode that takes place in the beautiful garden of the monastery where tranquil nature, perfumed flowers and crystalline water may represent the exaltation of aesthetics, or a medieval philosophical symbolism for the centre of knowledge. In this way, the garden, a place for serene meditation, becomes a place of dangerous sensuality and recalls a story from [METMO] that evokes the ancient myth of Hermaphroditus. Salmacis, a solitary nymph, collects flowers

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[10] A potential clue is provided by the fact that the protagonist is in a "delirium" [TM 41], after he has been observing the Madonna painting with voluptuousness for a while when suddenly Rosario-Matilda appears at his cell door.

near a small pond, surrounded by trees and soft meadows when Hermaphroditus, Venus and Mercury's beautiful adolescent son, approaches the bucolic scene:

> A river here he view'd, so lovely bright,
> It show'd the bottom in a fairer light,
> Nor kept a sand concealed from human sight:
> The stream produced nor slimy ooze, nor weeds,
> Nor miry rushes, nor the spiky reeds,
> But dealt enriching moisture all around,
> The fruitful banks with cheerful verdure crown'd,
> And kept the spring eternal on the ground.
> A nymph presides, not practiced in the chase,
> Nor skilful at the bow, nor at the race ;(…)
> Now in the limpid stream she views her face,
> And dress'd her image in the floating glass:
> On beds of leaves she now reposed her limbs,
> Now gather'd flowers that grew about her streams.
> [METMO I: 114-115, 434-57]

The *locus amoenus,* or beautiful place, reveals the quintessence of beauty and peace. However, it is the oxymoron of a terrifying tranquillity, which announces terrible events. Like the young innocent god, Ambrosio enters the peaceful place surrounded by a calm atmosphere in the same way as Hermaphroditus plunges into the pond. Both scenes highlight the sweetness of Nature and the extraordinary peace surrounding the *locus.* However, serenity and peace are only apparent. Ambrosio finds the novice Rosario who reveals her real feminine, sensuous nature and her love for him - a feeling that he initially rejects: "[…] recovering from his confusion, the Monk quitted the garden, and sped with precipitation towards the Abbey" [TM 59]. His escape from the woman is similar to Hermaphroditus's reaction when Salmacis introduces herself to the astonished boy and praises his beauty. He is surprised and flushes at the compliments. When the nymph tries to approach and embrace him, he asks her to stop or he will go away:

> Now gather'd flowers that grew about her streams,

And then by chance was gathering, as she stood
To view the boy, and long'd for what she view'd.
Fain would she meet the youth with hasty feet,
She fain would meet him, but refused to meet
Before her looks were set with nicest care,
And well deserved to be reputed fair.
"Bright youth," she cries, "whom all thy features prove
A god, and, if a god, the god of love;
But if a mortal, bless'd thy nurse's breast,
Bless'd are thy parents, and thy sisters bless'd:
But O! How bless'd, how more than bless'd thy bride!
Allied in bliss, if any yet allied.
If so, let mine the stolen enjoyments be;
If not, behold a willing bride in me."
The boy knew not of love, and, touch'd with shame,
He strove, and blush'd, but still the blush became;
(…)   He, innocently coy,
Replies, "O leave me to myself alone,
You rude incivil nymph, or I'll be gone"
[METMO I: 115, 457-483]

Salmacis is as astute as Matilda when she tries to seduce Ambrosio. Whereas Matilda uses her arts strategically, Salmacis is anxious to have her desire fulfilled. Therefore Hermaphroditus is beguiled by the nymph who manages to make to embrace him against his will. Her embrace becomes tragically eternal. The two creatures, Salmacis and Hermaphroditus becomes one ambiguous being, a strange form uniting their male and female essences. Ovid explains that one may say the creature is both or neither of them:

"O may the gods thus keep us ever join'd!
O may we never, never part again!"
So pray'd the nymph, nor did she pray in vain:
For now she finds him, as his lips she press'd.
Grow nearer still, nearer to her breast,
Till, piercing each the other's flesh, they run
Together, and incorporate in one:
Last, in one face are both their faces join'd,

> As when the stock and grafted twig combined
> Shoot up the same, and wear a common rind.
> [METMO I: 116, 507-516]

Intriguingly, we can observe a mysterious change in both characters in [TM]as well: they undergo the psychological process of feminization (Ambrosio) and masculinization (Matilda).[11] Matilda's strategy obliges the young man to discover physical joy and provokes a metamorphosis in him. The fact that Hermaphroditus and Salmacis become a single being, which, philosophically, can be interpreted as an ideal Platonic union, is ambiguous and could be connected to the characters' relationship in [TM]. Curiously, Ambrosio and Matilda are often together after the revelation of her identity and they appear to be a single entity, in an embrace that is desired and abhorred. The monk Ambrosio and the novice Rosario/Matilda give the impression of being but one person, united as Hermaphroditus. The gods' decision to unite Hermaphoditus with Salmacis is inexplicable and unmotivated, just like Matilda's obsessive presence that forcibly attaches Ambrosio to her devilish intentions. Some short scenes renovate the mystery surrounding Matilda's concrete presence or absence. When Don Ramirez and the archers arrive in the crypt after Antonia's murder, they look for "the Fugitive's retreat" [TM 393]. Once the crime is discovered, the Capuchins as well as "all Madrid" talk about "the Perpetrator". When the trial of the Inquisition begins "He was conducted to a spacious Hall" [422]. Matilda seems to have disappeared, or even to be non-existent. She becomes real only when she is alone with Ambrosio. On the contrary, she is absent when the scene is described by an external narrator or is not presented by Ambrosio's perspective. The most important feature here is that

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[11] Once their relationship progresses, Ambrosio becomes insecure and weak. On the other hand, Matilda is self-assured and aggressive. See Williams, *Art of Darkness*, and Doyle "Freud and the schizoid Ambrosio".

Ambrosio and Matilda's relationship is much more complex and unfathomable than a mere reciprocal passion and is similar to Hermaphroditus and Salmacis's union.

A third strong analogy with Ovid is of a general nature and involves sexual abuse. [METMO] introduce stories of gods and men who strongly desire to possess the women or men they are in love with, and are ready to use violence to achieve their goals. The violent actions of gods and humans, conveying extreme suffering, are reiterated in many episodes. The horrible climatic moment of Antonia's rape recalls the violence against and the indifference towards the woman, considered as a victim and as an object. Jupiter and other gods are consumed by the fire of desire and lust that turn them into violent entities. Taken by a sudden and violent passion as soon as he sees the young Proserpina, Pluto, the god of hell, presently decides to kidnap her. The moment before the god's abduction is suffused with delicate joy and is in profound contrast with the god's furious desire, which deeply resembles Ambrosio's sexual frenzy. The next passage is divided into two contrasting parts. We find the bucolic scene where an innocent and childish Proserpina (similar to Antonia) enjoys nature, which is abruptly interrupted by the devilish figure (similar to Ambrosio) of the divinity who violently abducts the girl to seduce her:

> Fresh fragrant breezes fan the verdant bowers,
> And the moist ground smiles with enamell'd flowers:
> The cheerful birds their airy carole sing,
> And the whole year in one eternal spring.
> Here while young Proserpine, among the maids,
> Diverts herself in these delicious shades;
> While, like a child, with busy speed and care,
> She gathers lilies here, and violets there;
> While first to fill her little lap she strives,
> Hell's grisly monarch at the shade arrives;
> Sees her sporting on the flowery green,
> And loves the blooming maid as soon as seen.

His urgent flame impatient of delay,
Swift as his thought he seizes the beauteous prey,
And bore her in his sooty car away.
[METMO I: 150-151, 594-608]

Proserpina, who is Pluto's kin, (a very important detail, considering that Antonia is Ambrosio's relative) is carried into the dark underworld to become his wife. The young woman invokes the help of her mother, Ceres, who cannot hear her because too far away from the scene. Proserpina is depicted as childish and innocent, and Antonia seems her perfect doppelganger. Proserpina's mother tries to stop Pluto but is powerless, just like Elvira, Antonia's mother, who cannot stop Ambrosio's deadly actions. The analogy with Proserpina's story is remarkably precise. After administering "a juice [which] brings the exact image of Death" [TM 329], Ambrosio leads Antonia to the subterranean dungeon to keep her forever with him in a place which is similar to Pluto's dark hell of the mythological tradition. **"**The depths profound through yielding waves he cleaves, / And to hell's centre a free passage leaves; / Down sinks his chariot, and his realms of night/ The god soon reaches with a rapid flight" [METMO I:152, 642-5]. Antonia is not only similar to Proserpina - her sad story also recalls Creusa, the girl that Apollo seizes while she is collecting flowers. After abducting her, the god violates the powerless girl in a dark and frightening cave where nobody can see or hear her. As Murray explains "[m]any rape myths involve trickery and disguises" (117) just like the magic potion used by Ambrosio to trick Antonia and cause her doom. Ovid's victims of rape are abandoned to a cruel destiny and only a metamorphosis can alleviate the pain. In the same way as Tereus, who decides to cut out Philomela's tongue after raping her, to be sure his sister-in-law's violation cannot be discovered, in the fourth book of [METMO], Ambrosio would like to silence Antonia so that she cannot reveal his abominable crime. The

carnal desire and violence of both gods and men are reproduced in Ambrosio, whose ego is exalted by Matilda's apparent adoration.

Further stylistic analyses and comparative studies, which are not the object of this study, between Ovid's original version and Dryden's rendering may contribute to better define the characteristics of the gothic author's narrative techniques and his borrowings either from the Latin text or the "englished" one.[12] Such studies could determine how Lewis may have been linguistically influenced by the various sources. If on the one hand he might have read the original versions of Ovid and other Latin poets by virtue of his classical education, on the other hand he may have chosen to read its translation and absorbed Dryden's renderings of Ovid. Ovid was a popular poet between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, and his works were regularly rendered in English, starting from the Renaissance onwards. Garth Tissol remarks that "[m]any of the best post-Restoration englishings of Ovid are collaborative in character and many reflect the dominant influence of John Dryden, whose own translations of Ovid were often ranked amongst his finest achievements" (204). The versatile historian, and poet John Oldmixon (1673-1742) claimed that "Dryden seems to have entered as far into the Genius as any of his Translators" (291). Sir Samuel Garth's collective translation of [METMO]*,* published in 1717, was a successful collaborative effort that united the versions of many poets and also included the verses translated by the late Dryden that continued to be used during the whole century (Tissol 206). Leaving the linguistic and stylistic problems aside, we might say that the Latin cultural matrix and Ovid dominated the poetic and literary universe of the long eighteenth century. The themes from antiquity played an important role in the creation of

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[12] To english is the technical verb frequently used by Gillespie and Hopkins and other scholars of literary translation to define the translation into English from foreign or ancient literatures.

literature during the Augustan age and later on. We might claim that Ovidian and Classic themes were instrumental for [TM], a multi-faceted novel made of miscellaneous cultural influences. Antiquity and Classicism were essential in the works of Lewis as well of other Gothic authors such as William Beckford and Ann Radcliffe.[13] Lewis's novel is essentially contradictory and although the writer aimed at *grandeur,* he was unable to obtain unanimous recognition. The textual ambiguities leave several questions unanswered. [TM] is a novel that creates misleading expectations of a romantic comedy that turn into a nightmare, in particular in the claustrophobic and dramatic description of the family tragedy. The text introduces different and opposing lines of narration. Picaresque situations intermingle with sentimental moments. The Ambrosio-Antonia plot shifts towards the libertine style and ends in a Sadean atrocity, echoing tragedies from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and dissolving into a Dantesque Inferno. We may argue that Lewis was able to take to the extreme Burke's dictum. This aesthetic statement can be found in Part V, Section VII, ("How words influence passions") and it corresponds to the last section of the *Enquiry: "*Now, as words affect, not by any original power, but by representation, it might be supposed, that their influence over the passions should be but light; yet it is quite otherwise; for we find by experience, that eloquence and poetry are as capable, nay indeed much more capable, of making deep and lively impressions than any other arts, and even than nature itself in very many cases" (334).[14] It may be true that Lewis shows a tendency to punish his characters, especially women, in a cruel way - an aspect which has been interpreted by various critics as

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[13] As I claimed in the conclusion in my PhD thesis on the early Gothic novels written during the last decades of the Eighteenth Century, Classical authors were fundamental also for William Beckford and Ann Radcliffe, the former being influenced by Lucretius (in *Vathek*) and the latter by Virgil (*The Romance of the Forest* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*).
[14] Burke's text was based on the canon of sublime inherited from the Classics via the French philosopher Boileau.

a psychoanalytical form of misogyny. I would argue that the motivation for certain crude descriptions and excesses may be found in the Ovidian matrix and in other classical sources that can be detected in the various plots and subplots of Lewis's novel. *The Monk* reveals and confirms the presence of varied influences that can be traced in several parts of the story, which is partly a jigsaw puzzle that the reader must solve and partly an incongruous construction of strange events. Lewis's imitation of classical masterpieces show that the writer wanted to give his characters a higher literary status. The novel contains many different voices of past and contemporary authors. Its eclectic style generates contradictory elements where opposing aspects co-exist. Lewis's strange novel is not only one of the most relevant Gothic stories but also a rich cultural catalogue, summarizing various and different forms of literature, and is worth analysing by virtue of its wide range of hypotheses. I would posit that the classical mould in Lewis is a constant presence in his early literary experiment such as *The Effusions of Sensibility* (Baron Wilson II: 242) as well as in his more mature works, as Professor James Uden has highlighted in his analysis of Anacreon and Juvenal's influence in Lewis's later works.[15] One interesting example of a classical source in Lewis is a poetic composition he dedicated to Danaë, written in imitation of the Greek poet Simonides (c.556-468 BC). The beautiful Danaë, once seduced by the mighty Jove in the form of golden rain, must face the dangers of the night alone at sea with her infant child (Baron Wilson II: 302). The poem was not only a sad meditation reflecting the author's condition, Lewis's love for the Classics is evidently much more deep-rooted than it might have been expected.

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[15] I refer to a panel presented by Professor James Uden during the 2017 IGA – Conference on 19 July 2017 at the Universidad de las Americas Puebla.

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