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THROUGH THE DEVIL'S MIRROR: THE VILLAIN AND THE SINTHOMOSEXUAL AS MANIFESTATIONS OF THE DEATH DRIVE

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ABSTRACT

Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) offers a model for reading queer sexuality and societal place very much in line with that which begins to emerge in early Gothic literature, including Matthew Lewis's *The Monk: A Romance* (1796). The Gothic villain aligns with Edelman's sinthomosexual to illustrate a pattern of victimization and retaliation which results in both the villain and sinthomosexual's persistent abjection from the social order. However, a close reading of Lewis's narrative for its depiction of psychological trauma rooted in sexual expression suggests that this queer negativity is not the sum total of the queer experience within the eighteenth century nor contemporary society. With the aid of a selection of prominent queer theorists and gothic scholars, this thesis endeavors to demonstrate the necessity of hope even as discrimination remains a reality.

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INTRODUCTION

The Gothic literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, characterized by its use of macabre imagery, imperiled damsels, frightful plots, and dynamic villains, has been subject to harsh censure for precisely these reasons until recent decades. The earliest critics reviled the Gothic for its luridness and seeming immorality, though many critics of the twentieth century emphasize a lack of realism and tendency to recycle the same grotesque elements ad infinitum as the primary flaws. This is particularly true of the masculine, horror Gothic with its reliance on grotesque imagery over the suspenseful plots of the explained supernatural in feminine, terror Gothic. Yet, a closer review suggests that such repetition of grotesque and horrific elements owes more to the genre's conventions of tapping into shared traumatic experiences and mutual fears than to a lack of originality. The obscene imagery of the Gothic is a blunt, often tactless exploration of social anxiety, and, in mirroring one another's patterns of excess and antagonism, its authors point toward a unifying struggle against a sexually and socially repressive environment. In addition to ongoing civil unrest following the French Revolution and persistent anti-Catholic sentiments, homosexuality became a pressing public issue by the 1800s.

The previous century had only just begun to recognize and codify alternate sexualities, and with this came the rise of molly houses, the public spaces where homosexuals were known to congregate. This tenuous acclimation to the hetero-divergent

community marks early instances of distinctly queer spaces and newfound awareness of this "other" group. Like Gothic storytelling, the discourse of homosexuality sparked a mix of fear and aversion beginning near the end of the seventeenth century, with lawful persecution and execution forcing many people into secrecy. In the wake of mounting paranoia, Gothic authors of the late eighteenth century used the uniquely dire genre to vent contemporary fears about sex and politics through temporally displaced narratives. It is understandable, then, that the sexually charged imagery in the Gothic is galvanized by some of its key authors, Horace Walpole, William Beckford, and Matthew Lewis, who, per Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's examination of this period in the seminal *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, were all likely homosexual.

These authors shaped the early Gothic's brand of social discourse and representation of alternate sexuality. Within the fatalistic plots of their novels, they create villains with diverse sexual appetites and a predilection for violence, which suggests the authors' shared interest in the consequences of socially unacceptable desire. The horror Gothic's emphasis on combining sexuality and violence points towards an emerging psychological pattern of making the sexual both monstrous and self-destructive. This becomes a hallmark of the Gothic villain and parallels real-world difficulties in reconciling the self with an inhospitable social climate. For the villains and their authors, each narrative reproduces an internal battle to secure their identities and their souls from judgment. This thesis will look at the complex relation between early Gothic literature, specifically Lewis's *The Monk: A Romance* (1796), and more recent claims by

prominent, contemporary queer theorists regarding the (im)possibility of queer assimilation into a western, heteronormative society.

Starting, then, with the genre of eighteenth-century horror Gothic, English writer and member of Parliament Matthew Lewis (1775-1818), educated in law, several languages, and literature like German *Schauerromanen* ("shudder novels"), wrote his seminal piece of Gothic literature, *The Monk*, at only age nineteen. "Monk" would become a lifelong, ironic moniker and facet of his identity until his eventual death at age forty-two. Though there is no historical confirmation of Lewis engaging in homosexual acts, "accusations of…effeminacy" and "his strong homosocial devotions" have led scholars to suspect his homosexuality alongside his notable, lifelong bachelorhood (Anderson *xxii*) . If, as David Lorne MacDonald suggests in his biography of Lewis, the author's "culture seems to have associated homosexuality with cross-dressing and transsexuality even more insistently than ours does" (69), then perhaps the most vital evidence of Lewis's sexuality comes from *The Monk* itself with its use of cross-dressing and gender role subversion. His tale centers on the exploits of the titular monk, Ambrosio, as he pursues the objects of his lust, Rosario/Matilda[1] and Antonia—the former a mysterious and sexually-charged demonic force, the latter both a virginal innocent and, unknown to all, his sister. *The Monk*'s insistence both on exploring the

[1] This thesis will refer to this character as Rosario/Matilda, given that the character identity shifts from male to female to indeterminate (once finally revealing their identity as a demon). Likewise, given the mingling of multiple identities, I will use they/them/their pronouns when referring to Rosario/Matilda.

mutability of sexual identity and rendering such a quality distinctly negative points toward an underlying fear of discovering proof of inherent immorality.

The reality or supposition of a world that permits only heteronormative individuals to act freely necessarily isolates anyone who knows themselves to be "other," and the attempt to mask this "otherness" ultimately proves unsustainable in Lewis's real and fictionalized worlds. Lewis's desire to act on his sexual impulses would necessarily be obstructed by his prominence as a member of parliament, though homosexuality was widely regarded as a vice of the wealthy. Indeed, to act upon homosexual impulses could spell disaster, even exile or execution, if it became too public[2]. Authors of the late eighteenth-century Gothic frame this division between self and society through their antisocial villains who lack meaningful connections with other people[3]. For both the homosocial author Lewis and the unfulfilled monk he describes, constant but untenable self-denial colors their reality and impedes typical integration into society. For Ambrosio, this plays out in a series of homicidal, sexually violent, or self-defacing acts of increasing severity. This display of intense, destructive desire is neither isolated nor original to Lewis. Beckford's Vathek in the novel of the same name(1786) is literally driven by a

[2] The rich were comparatively exempt from persecution as a homosexual thanks to their wealth and connections, but even this was not sure protection.
[3] Horace Walpole's Manfred seeks a son and heir after his first son dies. He notably despises his wife and undervalues his daughter. Even Anne Radcliffe, writing in the feminine terror Gothic vein, echoes the emphasis on progeny when Schedoni discovers he has a daughter and exchanges his antagonism towards her for protectiveness.

demon to sacrifice hundreds of children, and Walpole's Manfred from *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), who fears the end of his lineage, accidentally murders his own daughter.

More than two hundred years after Lewis published *The Monk*, the queer theory movement of literary and cultural studies provides a fresh tool for reading the sexual deviancies of Gothic literature. Indeed, the macabre elements of the Gothic and the genre's love of sexual difference and exploration make it an excellent candidate for dealing with the confusions and trauma characteristic of queer identity in past centuries. That is, while homosexuality as a concept emerged in Lewis's time, it largely proved insufficient to encapsulate what would become the queer community which came to represent all who figure any deviation from western, normative notions of heterosexual relationships based around procreation. Queer theory's emphasis on exploring the marginalized and recontextualizing outmoded understandings of sexuality has long made it a staple of discussions on the Gothic.

Lewis and the queer theorists draw similar conclusions about why our bedfellows are of such concern. Among the prominent theorists, Lee Edelman explores the implications of queer exclusion from society in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004). He poses the bleak idea that for the queer community, primarily homosexuals, assimilation into society is made impossible by an inherent dissimilarity in both desire and motivation between themselves and the mainstream, heterosexual community. That is, he accepts as irremovable the lasting stain of the homophobic beliefs expressed in far-right ideology, that homosexuality destabilizes and threatens social

norms and conventions because (he reasons) homosexuality precludes indoctrination into heteronormative values. Because society chooses to perceive homosexuality and queerness as threatening and negative, the traits are forced upon them regardless of their nature.

Edelman's theory hinges upon the mutual and unabated antagonism between the Child symbol of heteronormative politics and the sinthomosexual byproduct of this imperfect political model. Edelman asserts the Child symbol, a figure embodying the perpetually deferred but ever-important future, unifies heteronormative culture around the common goal of procreation and leaving our children a better world. Reversely, the "sinthomosexual," a hetero-divergent individual incapable of or uninterested in reproduction due to their sexuality, is perpetually at odds with this figure, and by extension, the wider society. Edelman asserts sinthomosexuals are governed by the death drive and *jouissance*[4], even to the point of harm or detriment as they do not participate in the hope of futurity. Antagonism toward society, both self-elected and externally enforced, defines the sinthomosexual's (non)role in the community. While Edelman primarily applies this theory to the experiences of homosexuals within western culture, it may feasibly apply to any individual whose sex or sexuality would exclude them from participating in traditional, procreative society and the futurity it provides. For those who find themselves unable to form lasting ties with the future, Edelman suggests there is

[4] *Jouissance* is the pursuit of pleasure, but it takes on distinctly self-destructive tendencies within Edelman's theory.

little incentive to operate within the conventions of society, as there is no long-term payoff.

Edelman's forerunner, Leo Bersani, in his seminal work, *Homos,* first posited the antisocial thesis of queer theory and the notion that resistance to homosexuality is a matter of power. Homosexual acts are not an issue until they are public, discussed, and complicating an otherwise stable social order. Jenny DiPlacidi sums up one of Bersani's points on the origin of aversion to homosexuality as "a more profound anxiety about a threat to the way people are expected to relate to one another, which is not too different from saying the way power is positioned and exercised in our society" (250). That is, Bersani's line of questioning emphasizes the role of sexual behavior in social power structures. What does it mean when a man tops another man? Looking back as far as ancient Greece, Bersani identifies that moral taboo as male passivity. He simplifies this as the maxim: "*To be penetrated is to abdicate power*" ("Is the Rectum a Grave" 212). In recreating the male/female power dynamic between two men, the certainty of male authority dissolves into confusion. Edelman asserts that the very nature of queerness calls attention to where the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic meet and breakdown. The queer is *guilty* because he or she is *publicly queer*, and people can see this. The Symbolic order which the world has oriented itself around (and which conveniently defines the proper roles of men, women, and children) is rudely confronted with an odd piece that cannot and will not mesh. The homosexual is dangerous because it dismantles sociopolitical constants and is thus to be feared.

For his part in carrying on Bersani's idea, Edelman asserts that this is the sinthomosexual's lot: to exist in the perpetual negation of social values without the possibility of acceptance or stability. Edelman's description of the social order closely parallels what Lewis encounters in his own life. Edelman's theory of antisocial queer relations, particularly non-reproduction as a cause for social exclusion, may easily extend to include Ambrosio's enforced celibacy as a monk and his seclusion in the monastery. As sinthomosexuals are a "child-aversive, future-negating force" (Edelman 113), they closely parallel Lewis's titular character Ambrosio, a villain who both kills a Child Symbol and damns his own soul. This destructive behavior is a vivid expression of death drive-enforced *jouissance* and sits at the core of *The Monk.* Ambrosio encounters a world that cannot or will not accommodate his sexuality and eventually breaches social decency in pursuit of *jouissance*, an act that must ultimately prove fatal for its transgression of social norms.

The combination of criminalizing sexuality and reproducing sexual violence in Gothic literature, when examined through the lens of queer theory, forces readers to consider whether the antisocial mindset Edelman posits is the mounting anxiety of sexually heterogeneous people confronting the apparent impossibility of social acceptance. Such is the severity of this fear-induced hypothesizing that it acts out the theoretical terminal-point of social persecution in multiple texts. Lewis, as a likely homosexual working out his fears in a society still grappling with a presumed queer threat, both negotiates and informs the homosexual's role by posing Ambrosio as the

doomed, non-reproductive antithesis of social and moral values. Both Lewis and Edelman show the villain/sinthomosexual feels compelled to antagonize the part of society they cannot themselves pursue and retaliate against the looming social judgment. Thus, *The Monk* and *No Future* perpetuate and amplify the homosexual panic that Sedgwick identifies in *Between Men*.

Objectives

This thesis's initial aim is to illustrate and map the nearly exact parallel between Lewis's novel and Edelman's theory as they demonstrate a recursive psychological habit of mutual antagonism between mainstream, heteronormative society and the queer community in its myriad forms and the destruction of the villain/sinthomosexual. In doing so, I will discuss how the formation of worst-case-scenarios enable the authors to negotiate what they perceive as an inhospitable, anti-homosexual climate deeply tied to the panic Sedgwick describes in *Between Men*. This is particularly evident in the complex, often destructive relationships the villains/sinthomosexuals maintain with the world around them. Ultimately, I will demonstrate how *The Monk* and *No Future*, through fatalistic assessments of the homosexual's place in society, push beyond self-preservation to willful antagonism and reinforces their contempt of hegemonic society.

This study will illustrate how Lewis's novel performs—to the point of inevitable termination—the supposed reality of Edelman's sinthomosexuals, and it will identify the circumstances that force such individuals to adopt negative, death drive-induced actions in the fictional realm. By mapping the correlation between Edelman's symbolic

constructs and Lewis's development of Gothic archetypes—an almost one-to-one relation—this study will demonstrate that the extreme reactions of the sinthomosexuals are the recursive (possibly inevitable) result of closeting in *The Monk.* Lewis creates overt, monstrous representations of the anxieties weighing on his mind in the form of such creatures as Matilda, the devil, Ambrosio, and the corrupt and intolerant Prioress who imprisons Agnes. Such symbols may owe their conception to the psychological framework laid out by Julia Kristeva's abject theory and Judith Butler's theory of gender performance. Even the child-symbol, an emblem in whose name, according to Edelman's theory, all future-ensuring actions are taken, is accounted for in Lewis's novel in Antonia and in her mother's efforts to protect her. Lewis's novel follows Edelman's premise of mutual antagonism through the child symbol as a rallying point for western culture and the sinthomosexual's antagonism towards it. I will discuss how Lewis's fatalistic choice to have Ambrosio rape and murder Antonia suggests his own antipathy towards the child symbol in a futile gesture. Through these characters and the fate of his sexually deviant monk, Lewis acts out the possible fate of the homosexual.

Yet, while Lewis and Edelman both explore the homosexual's difficult place in society, both of their works cleave more to what they fear rather than what is probable. Sedgwick's discussion of Gothic literature's origin contextualizes Lewis's works by highlighting the pervasive fear and social rejection he and others risked just by their sexuality. Yet, this fatalistic reading is only one way of looking at the situation. This view, along with Edelman's suggestion that queerness is inherently defined by its

outsider status in society, forecloses discussion on the individual's ability to define themself. My second objective is arguing for the Gothic novel as a fear-driven roadmap wherein Lewis vents (through a literary mask) his frustration at the prospect of social persecution and spiritual damnation. In this alternative view, the literary imagination provides both the author and readers a shared outlet through which they can together recognize their concerns and decide whether to accept or resist its cause. Using Ambrosio as his primary proxy, Lewis works through the dual pressures of an oppressive, unjust social climate exemplified by institutionally corrupt characters such as the Prioress and the fear of an inescapable, innate moral failing represented by the devil.

Lastly, I will argue against the unquestionable necessity of queer self-identification with the villain/sinthomosexual. Though both Lewis and Edelman's ideas arise from legitimate concerns about the reality of the queer community's persecution, their work amplifies fear and tension to its highest pitch. The incendiary nature of their works reinforces the self-identification of those who are "Othered" by society with the villain/sinthomosexual and suggests they should be viewed as people deviating from heteronormativity as forces for societal destruction. Edelman asserts, "We, the sinthomosexuals who figure the death drive of the social, must accept that we will be vilified as the agents of that threat" (153), but this negates the potential for assimilation and, true to the death drive it identifies with, pushes for self-destruction. In contrast to this, the late Jose Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* and like-minded queer theorists assert a more hopeful idea of inclusion and

assimilation for homosexuals even if the possibility remains distant. I will show how in *The Monk* Lewis opens up another more open character trajectory in contrast to Ambrosio, and I will compare to examples of Edelman's Child symbol in Lewis's work, Antonia and Theodore, to demonstrate both their closeness to Edelman's ideas and their departure from the fixity he ascribes to this role. Using Sedgwick and Muñoz's less pessimistic views of homosexuality's social place as an alternative approach, I intend to treat Lewis and Edelman's texts as social critiques of mutual antagonism rather than accurate representations of sinthomosexuals and society.

Literature Review

For this thesis, I will deal with those critics who provide queer readings of *The Monk*, like Sedgwick, George Haggerty, Lauren Fitzgerald, and Clara Tuite. My research centers on those theorists who personally explore or pertain to queer trends in Gothic literature. Their dealings with sexuality and queer theory in *The Monk* and on the Gothic lay the groundwork for my own analysis. I addition, I will be drawing heavily on a selection of major queer theorists, including Edelman, Butler, Kristeva, and Muñoz, whose exploration of sexuality and identity proves vital to understanding the psychology of *The Monk*. Much of the psychoanalytic criticism these scholars employ draws from the works of Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan, with Foucault's treatment of homosexuality proving particularly instrumental in developing various queer theory views of homosexuals' role in society. While I do not draw directly on these earlier scholars, their influence can be felt in most of the queer theory used in this thesis.

Scholarship on The Monk

Much discussion of the Gothic in queer theory derives from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "Toward the Gothic: Terrorism and Homosexual Panic" from her seminal work, *Between Men*, where she identifies the emergence of gay culture in British society and the corresponding backlash against it. Sedgwick's contribution to the study of queer history and the formation of homosexual culture is impossible to overstate, and she is particularly key to discourse on the political forces that shaped homophobic ideas. The literal terrorism she describes (such as burning down homosexual havens) illustrates the problematic rhetoric surrounding homosexuality which emerges in this period. The criticism regards the early Gothic, what becomes the horror Gothic after Lewis, as a manifestation of social anxieties on all fronts (political, religious, social, and sexual), but the unifying themes of depravity and villainy shared among the authors is a ubiquitously captivating aspect for the scholarship. This ties closely with Sedgewick's assertion that political forces vilified and weaponized homosexuality as a means of checking male homosocial relations (even between heterosexual men) as a political strategy of the time rather than an organic social development. Such anomalies undoubtedly paved the way for future literary trends of confusing gender and sexuality as means of indicating perversion, instability, and outright malice. Another of her works, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay is about You," expands this idea of queer fear and carries it to the contemporary discussion in queer theory. *Epistemology of the Closet* contends that the hetero/homosexual dichotomy

the sexual discourse hinges upon fails to account for and accommodate what she deems her "universalizing view" of sexuality on a spectrum (1).

For a general overview, Haggerty's *Queer Gothic* (2006) provides one of the most concise and comprehensive reviews of the Gothic as it relates to the formative years of western culture's understanding of sexuality. He, like many critics, draws particular attention to how desire, not necessarily hetero- or homosexual desire, drives the plots of Gothic literature. Indeed, this transgressive brand of literature functioned as a sort of proving ground for the budding codification of sexualities in the period. Several of his articles are perhaps more vital for my own purposes for their focused discussion on the early Gothic and Lewis's work. He pays close attention both to the influence of sexuality and religion, particularly Catholicism, on the formation of Lewis's plot's tension. Haggerty's response to Sedgwick's "Toward the Gothic," an examination of the early Gothic's homosexual authors, follows close at hand, and he concludes that untenable social realities such individuals face inevitably result in madness. The criticism responds to the early Gothic, what becomes the horror Gothic after Lewis, as a manifestation of social anxieties on all fronts (political, religious, social, and sexual), but the unifying themes of depravity and villainy shared among the authors is a ubiquitously captivating aspect for the scholarship.

There are a few other Gothic scholars who contribute significantly to the discussion of Gothic sexuality. Peter Grudin is one of the earliest scholars to draw attention to the fact that elements of *The Monk* do not always neatly line up, and his is

one of the first efforts to draw out the authorial intent behind this seeming incongruence. Lauren Fitzgerald is notable as a major and recent scholar of the Gothic and *The Monk* particularly. Her work regarding Theodore, who, though frequently touched on, generally remained a minor feature is particularly key to my later argument. For Fitzgerald, Theodore presents as another homosexual, but one permitted a happy, if conditional, existence by the end of the novel. Ruth Bienstock Anolik and Jenny DiPlacidi both make critical arguments of the mother's role in Gothic narratives, highlighting their vulnerability and threats, respectively.

Queer Theorists

Edelman's contributions to queer theory have pushed for discussions of queerness's place in society by challenging the queer community's ability to integrate and thrive in society. Essentially, he theorizes there is no possibility of queer utopia—no future—and, since there can be no "right" way to develop a fully accepting society, the queer remains outside and antagonistic to any political structure. He draws on Lacanian principles of the sinthome (symptom) and *jouissance* (desire) to couch his own theory of how homosexual desire exerts itself in a futile, often-destructive manner. Edelman's body of scholarship already has a history of application to contemporary Gothic works, such as Steven Bruhm's use of *True Blood* and Theresa L. Geller and Anne Marie Banker's application of it to *American Horror Story*. This brand of queer theory, drawing deeply on Freud, Foucault, and Lacan, is vital in identifying and explaining the assortment of destructive, antisocial behaviors of literary characters like those featured in the Gothic.

If Lewis's *The Monk* explores the queer past and Edelman engages the queer present, it is Jose Esteban Muñoz' *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* which looks to the future. His approach to queer politics emphasizes an "educated hope" (2) for a queerness still on the horizon rather than a call for "queer optimism" (2). Muñoz's text is no less aware of the prejudice facing the queer community, nor is he less critical of the heteronormative society. Despite his close reading of queer historical moments and art (including the Stonewall Riots and Andy Warhol), his ideas are rooted in anticipating the future the queer community is working to inhabit (while admitting we may never). This forward-thinking represents a critical shift in queer theory's approach to the conversation on futurity and belonging, which criticizes what Muñoz deems "disabling political pessimism" (9). That is, the antisocial bent of theories like Edelman's fail because they "replaced the romance of community with the romance of singularity and negativity" (Muñoz 10). Muñoz values the role of negativity in the queer discourse as a means of not simply opposing political discourse but its capacity to shut down or disengage from an untenable political situation even as he seeks to navigate around it.

I also make some use of Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler in my examination of Gothic relations, and both have a history of application in this area. Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* describes abjection as that which the symbolic order cannot account for and which threatens it for this reason. She notably applies this to the child's relation to the mother and the process of self-differentiation, and thus features

frequently in discussions of Gothic mothers. Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* posits sex and gender as cultural constructs and critiques the apparent fixity of such labels. Butler has proven pivotal in most discussions of Rosario/Matilda, including Fitzgerald and Max Fincher's look at camp in *The Monk,* for her idea that "that there need not be a 'doer behind the deed,' but that the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed" (181). That is, one's identity is defined through their interactions rather than prior to it. Consequently, the cultural ideas of sex, identity, and power are made precarious, and their fallibility is called to the surface.

This body of criticism, itself covering a great deal of historical and psychological thinking, will be considered in the context of a novel infamous for its own winding structure and interconnected plots. The complexities, even confusion, of the novel mirror those of the sexual ideas Lewis is attempting to navigate. Some of the queer theorists' ideas relate only to specific sections or plotlines of the novel as Lewis explores different issues beyond those of his titular monk. To this end, I have included a brief summary framing the relevant plots of The Monk and the characters within.

The Monk: Chronological Summary

For the purposes of introducing the novel and clarifying the chain of events that culminates in Ambrosio's willful damnation, this summary will overview the dual plots of *The Monk*. The narrative is divided into the main plot and a subplot, which occasionally interact and, at the end, resolve nearly simultaneously. The main storyline, which I will prioritize, revolves around Ambrosio, Matilda, and Antonia as they

maneuver through a series of sexually violent interactions. The secondary story of Don Raymond, Agnes, and Theodore primarily focuses on how they seek to deal with the fallout of Agnes's pre-marital sex life and subsequent, unwilling installment in a convent.

The Monk follows a celebrated and pious monk, Ambrosio, as he finds himself introduced to newfound desires. He has previously made a name for himself for his religious severity and brilliance, and early into the novel, he upholds this by turning the pregnant Agnes over to the Prioress before she can escape her convent. Agnes curses him for this and his life soon begins to unravel when the novitiate Rosario, a son-like companion to him and his only close friend at the monastery, prepares to confess a secret. Rosario reveals himself to be a young girl, Matilda, and eventually convinces Ambrosio to sleep with her despite his apprehensions. Ambrosio embraces hedonism in the wake of his newly discovered sexual appetites, becoming increasingly debauched until he loses interest in the increasingly masculine Matilda. He turns his attention to Antonia, a young girl who has come to Madrid, and Matilda helps him in his efforts to seduce her. Eventually, this results in her mother, Elvira's, murder and Antonia's own subsequent kidnapping, rape, and murder.

The final portion of Ambrosio's narrative follows at the heels of Antonia's rape. With the monastery burning down, Don Raymond, a young aristocrat, leads a group of soldiers through the church in his efforts to bring the church to justice for his sister Agnes's death. It is here that Don Raymond discovers Ambrosio with the dead Antonia, and he and Matilda are apprehended. Ambrosio is eventually convinced to sell his soul

for freedom from the cell, but the devil reveals that it was all a trick. Ambrosio has only won freedom from the cell, and he is soon informed that this was part of a plan to make him fall to evil and forfeit his soul. Ultimately, the devil pushes him over a cliff to his slow death and eventual damnation.

Meanwhile, the second narrative follows Don Raymond after he returns from his adventures in Germany where he first met Agnes, Don Lorenzo's sister, and Theodore, his new page and friend. While Agnes has been imprisoned by the Prioress, Don Raymond convinces Don Lorenzo of his sincere love for his sister by recounting their past, but they are horrified when, in response to a papal bull for Agnes's release, they are told of her death. However, Mother St. Ursula, a sympathetic nun, gives Theodore a basket with a note telling them to rally the authorities. During a parade, the men gather the inquisition to arrest the Prioress, and this results in a mob forming against the church and burning down the convent and monastery. Don Lorenzo unwittingly saves his sister, and, after a period of recovery, Don Raymond and she enjoy their happily ever after.

Justification

An abundance of sexual violence, perverse acts, and forays into criminality within the Gothic make it an ideal choice for using queer theory to explore the sexual tensions underpinning society. *The Monk*, of course, reflexively conflates sexual variance with moral degradation and danger to society. Where many critics of the novel of in previous decades began the work of drawing out the textual dissonance (Grudin) or unifying historical accounts of Lewis's life with his text to highlight Ambrosio's queerness

(Sedgwick and Haggerty), my thesis aims to explore the nuances behind this sexuality. Particularly, where scholars like Sedgwick, Grudin, Hogle, and others draw attention to the confusion and incoherence that colors *The Monk* and renders it nearly impossible to clearly define the characters' natures, I argue that this is evidence of Lewis accurately portraying the very nature of the sinthome. That is, the points where logic and intelligibility break down are the moments where the sinthome Edelman describes most fully emerge and exert their culture-aversive properties.

Moving beyond Sedgwick's discussion of terror as the root of queer Gothicism and linking it to the negativity inherent to Edelman's theory, I aim to demonstrate how this same terror colors parts of contemporary queer theory. This thesis will draw attention to these non-heteronormative behaviors and their association with dark or negative Gothic elements to illustrate how this often-destructive practice undermines efforts at establishing a role for queers in society.

However, I will posit an alternative, less defeatist mode of viewing queer relations. With the addition of Sedgwick's analysis of homosexuality's rocky development in western culture, I will make it clear that Edelman's sinthomosexuals are the wary, time-hardened byproduct of self-perpetuating antagonism rather than the fixed identity of the queer community. Inasmuch as *The Monk* figures Lewis's identity as a gay author in western society, it is my aim to review how his narrative at once legitimizes and subverts the bigoted mindset of his period by affirming the correlation between alternate sexuality and sexual violence. Furthermore, as both the novel and the theory position the

villain/sinthomosexual as diametrically opposed to all social and political structures, I will critique their obstruction of attempts to stabilize relations. In looking at this mental framework, this thesis aims to push towards resolving the unhealthy aspects of queer Gothicism for a more practicable variant of healing and celebration.

Methods of Study

This thesis will open with a historical look at Matthew Lewis and the context he was writing in before shifting to a close reading of *The Monk* for the bulk of the discussion. I will first establish the correlation of the Gothic text to Edelman's queer concepts and then move into the social and psychological climate that produces sinthomosexuality before returning to Lewis's characters who model this identity. Finally, I will return to Lewis's historical context and the current social climate to highlight social shifts, new ideas of queer identity, and the value of promoting queer futurity over fatalistic resignation to self-destruction. Following this introduction, my study will consist of four chapters: "The Self as Other," "Mothers, Lovers, and Other Enemies," "Negotiating the Future," and "Conclusion." "The Self as Other" will focus on the historical background and the connection between Lewis and Edelman, as well as villains and sinthomosexuals. The following chapter, "Mothers, Lovers, and Other Enemies," will look more closely at the societal and interpersonal relationships the produce sinthomosexuals. This will involve Kristeva and Butler's theories as well as symbolic characters from *The Monk* which correspond with the principles Edelman lays out. Finally, "Negotiating the Future" will examine Lewis's two primary child figures,

Antonia and Theodore, to explore both ends of queer interaction with society. The former will highlight the anticipated queer antagonism, and the second will consider Lewis's hope for a better relationship with society. This chapter will also emphasize fear as the primary factor controlling such depictions. The "Conclusion" chapter will then consider new developments for the queer community in the public eye and the hope they represent.

1. THE SELF AS OTHER

Villainy in *The Monk* is a matter of choice. That is, Ambrosio is faced with the choice of whether he will sleep with Rosario/Matilda, rape Antonia, kill his enemies, sell his soul, or perform any number of other crimes given the opportunity. Unfortunately, Lewis's narrative this choice is pre-ordained by a spiritual devil and a physical sexuality, each equally immutable and irresistible. In Lewis's novel, as in Edelman's theory, hetero-divergent sexuality is conceptualized as negatively charged and inherently destructive regardless of the individual's character. This notion is enforced both by active social persecution and a fatalistic compulsion in *The Monk*'s narrative to have Ambrosio kill his own family and destabilize his community by undermining trust in the church.

Lewis's peculiar conflation of physical homosexuality with moral turpitude, including everything from incest/pedophilia/murder to subversion of the family, is part of a long-term habit of western culture which has, over the centuries, produced Edelman and the public's notion that the queer community is incompatible with society. *The Monk,* like other male-authored Gothic narratives of the late eighteenth century, exemplifies an underlying (and very much justified) anxiety of castigation for violating sexual taboos. In this way, Lewis anticipates the already looming backlash against hetero-divergent sexualities as they rise to public awareness and grapples with his own place in the world.

This chapter will first contextualize Lewis's life and sexuality to illustrate its parallels with Ambrosio's own before turning to how the villainous monk character

produces the same pattern as the sinthomosexual. David Lorne Macdonald provides especially relevant insight into Lewis's life through his use of Sedgwick's updated sexual terminology to amend previous, inaccurate readings of the author's life as specifically and definitively homosexual. I will use Lewis's careful obfuscation of both his and Ambrosio's sexualities as evidence of the fundamental lack of coherence within both of their sexualities. While both may prove to be queer, the sheer instability of their exact sexual identities is a crucial element of understanding their place in society and the development of sinthomosexuality. Regardless of the exact nature of this sexuality, it "others" the author and his character from their society and puts them in unwilling opposition to their culture. Ultimately, this leaves both individuals thoroughly entrenched in the uneasy position of the sinthomosexual and enthralled by the *jouissance*, the self-effacing pursuit of pleasure Edelman offers for sinthomosexuals, that comes with Ambrosio's damnation or Lewis's evocation of public outrage.

Author as Villain

Matthew Lewis's sexuality remains a matter of speculation, one which even accomplished critics of *The Monk* and queer theorists cannot absolutely affirm either way, but the scholarship generally regards him as a homosexual based on his personality, rumors of male lovers, and, most vitally, his writings. Notions about his sexuality have significantly influenced discussions on how he presents both sexual exploration and power dynamics. This thesis will subscribe to the popular view that he was, at the very least, homo*social* and build upon the textual evidence supporting it.

In discussing Lewis's sexuallity, David Lorne Macdonald draws on some of his poetic works, which, like Theodore's to be discussed in "Negotiating the Future", are highly suggestive of his sexual desires. He finds in the last lines of Lewis's "Elegy, On the Approaching Departure of a Friend" an "insistence of repression" (Macdonald 67) that I must second:

> But let no vain regrets in plaintive diction
> Betray the anguish, that your Soul endures;
> Veil with assumed content your keen affliction,
> Nor wish his heart to feel a pang like yours:
>
> Let not one sigh declare, your soul is smarting
> Let not his Eye one tear in thine discern;
> Force a feint smile, wring hard his hand at parting,
> Then haste thee home and pray for his return! (Macdonald 67)

Particularly troubling is the possibility that this might simply be Lewis's friend in the most chaste sense of the word, and, if so, it can only reinforce Sedgwick's argument that homosexuality policed not only its participants but also the heterosexuals fearing they might be similarly branded. Why should it be that a friend could not openly express his affection, particularly if they will be parting ways? The last line of the earlier stanza emphasizes a wish to avoid not just communicating the pain but also sharing it. As Macdonald continues his accounts of Lewis's potential love interests, he notes the author

"seems to have become more discreet as he grew older" (70). While in itself this is no remarkable shift for a man who may well have been worn down if not by homophobia directly then at least by his prolonged bachelorhood and the fear of attracting suspicions of homosexuality, the particular effect of producing silence appears to be a key tactic of the cultural paranoia.

Though rumors of his male lovers, including the son of his friend and fellow writer, Isabella Kelly, circulated during his lifetime, prominent Lewis biographers MacDonald and Louis C. Peck both assert that there is "no evidence that Lewis ever engaged in homosexual behavior" (Macdonald 64). MacDonald, though, argues that the evidence is at least indicative of something like homosexuality. As the concept of different sexualities was still novel in the period, MacDonald argues Lewis would characterize his relationships as "romantic friendships rather than love affairs" or, to borrow Sedgewick's term, "homo*social* rather than homosexual" (64, italics mine). The church's hold over social discourse in the 1700s would deter the less daring from overtly identifying with their sexuality, forming public social bonds, or building up their identities as homosexuals for fear of prosecution and execution. Lewis's four most notable, possible companions were Charles William Stewart, William Lamb, Charles Grey, and an unnamed "magnet" (Macdonald 67-69), but their relations with Lewis are all similarly unconfirmed. What is known of his affection for them is largely restricted to letters and poems sufficiently veiled as to pass most public inspection. At the very least, though, it may be acknowledged both that "homosexuality" as a term cannot adequately

account for his relations because "until surprisingly recently, homosexuality—or, to use the term they tend to favour, sodomy—was considered a matter of behaviour, not of identity" (MacDonald 64) and that Lewis appears to have at least some homosocial inclination.

Lewis's *queerness*, the fundamental departure from clear-cut heterosexuality without necessarily being homosexual, is much easier to show. Perhaps the best support for Lewis's ties to the sexually transgressive comes from a brief letter to his mother wherein he asks her if she notes similarities between Anne Radcliffe's Montoni in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and himself, saying, "I confess, that it struck me, and as He is the Villain of the Tale, I did not feel much flattered by the likeness" (Peck 209). *The Mysteries of Udolpho* was the first of the Gothic novels Radcliffe and Lewis would write in direct conversation with one another, yet only *The Monk* explicitly emphasizes sexual violence. Thus, Lewis's response to Radcliffe's narrative and villain points toward the brand of villainy more interesting and sexually explicit. Certainly, by portraying sex and sexuality divergent from strictly enforced values, he succeeds in challenging his world's convenient, heteronormative moral framework.

By publishing *The Monk*, Lewis found himself in the same predicament as the villain/sinthomosexual. In William B. Todd's account of *The Monk*'s publication history, he notes the second edition of the novel was the first to announce its author and the author's other profession, "M. G. Lewis, Esq. M. P." (12). Todd emphasizes the shock that a Member of Parliament, "to the horror of all…was the spectacle of a man elected to

office that he might preserve morality in the realm, and acknowledging as his a work apparently designed to corrupt all morals" (13). Edelman could hardly hope to find a real-life figure as perfectly encapsulating of the sinthomosexual he describes, and Lewis's characterization here is made doubly potent by his otherwise upstanding behavior. There are no drunken escapades, history of gambling, or evidence of sexual misconduct to paint the picture of Lewis as a social deviant. Instead, the publication of *The Monk* is the singular sin Lewis can be charged with, and, quite in the spirit of failed morality which the novel describes, this sin proves sufficiently damning for many. Thomas Mathias's *The Pursuits of Literature* (1796) denounces Lewis as such:

> A legislator in our own parliament, a member of the House of Commons of Great Britain, an elected guardian and defender of the laws, the religion, and the good manners of the country, has neither scrupled nor blushed to depict and to publish to the world the arts of lewd and systematic seduction, and to thrust upon the nation the most open and unqualified blasphemy against the very code and volume of our religion. (qtd. in Todd 13)

To be sure, no small amount of Mathias's antipathy owes to certain other passages in *The Monk*, including the particularly incendiary, if amusing, scene of Elvira explaining that she censored parts of the Bible that "excite ideas the worst calculated for a female breast" (Lewis 393). Yet Edelman's sinthomosexual has emerged in a fit of self-expression as Lewis, fully aware of the dangers his work entailed, signs his name to the novel and, in queer fashion, destabilizes his public identity. The "lewd and systematic seduction"

Mathias identifies as an assault on "our religion" illustrates not only the overtly sexual nature of the threat but also how the villain/sinthomosexual is an externally enforced role. That is, while Lewis knows the reaction his work elicits, it does so only because it bucks against the force of "the laws, the religion, and the good manners" so bent on controlling the populace sexually and otherwise. These constraints which Lewis finds himself opposed to were not meant to check only those deemed deviant, though. Sedgwick suggests that homophobia was augmented and weaponized by secular authorities as a means of limiting male bonds and stifling even non-sexual homosocial relations[5]. Political structures of the time made it risky to associate too closely with those on the wrong side of public opinion and thereby kept even those who broke no codes in fear of being ostracized. Thus, even sociable societies and activities of heterosexual men were at risk of being branded deviant. Lewis and other hetero-divergent people, then, would not have been the only ones to suffer from this new tactic for policing morality.

In truth, Lewis's readers seemed dissatisfied with actions meant to correct the immorality of *The Monk*. Over the course of its early publication, *The Monk* was distributed in several editions, the fourth of which was panned by readers for removing the most offensive parts. According to William B. Todd, *The East Indian* (1800) featured a note on the pending fourth edition of *The Monk* reading: "In this edition the Author has paid particular attention to some passages that have been objected to. - A few remaining

[5] Sedgwick draws heavily on Alan Bray's (1948-2001) *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* and his account of the political discourse which shaped homophobia.

copies of the original edition may be had by applying to the Publisher" (qtd. in Todd 20). Todd adds that fake first editions of *The Monk* correspondingly doubled in price after this announcement, likely underscoring how unwelcome such corrections were to fans. While the moral authority of the period may be the loudest and exert great pressure, the peculiar disfavor of the fourth edition suggests the moral sentiments are not so universal nor so absolute as they would like to seem. Indeed, it was the public's love of eroticism and horror which Lewis capitalized on. For all the startling contents of Lewis's novel, though, it, like all other Gothic works of the time, notably omitted one particular vice: homosexuality.

Villain as Sinthomosexual

In early Gothic literature, there is no instance of explicit, male-on-male sexual interaction. Rape? A staple. Matricide? A fan favorite. Gay stuff? Unthinkable. Despite Sedgewick's assertion of several Gothic authors' homosexuality—"Beckford notoriously, Lewis probably, Walpole iffily" ("Toward the Gothic" 92)—none of them go so far as to portray male, homosexual relations among their litany of sexual transgressions and certainly not in any positive, stable relationship. It is not until 1872, more than half a century later, that Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* displayed overt female homosexuality. Homosexuality as an identity was, as yet, no casual matter of identity and it remained subject to harsh censure even after the last formal English executions on the grounds of homosexuality in 1835 (Cook et al. 109). By 1890, Oscar Wilde released *The Portrait of Dorian Gray,* and, per Wilde biographer Nicholas Frankel, the novel was immediately

censored for “making more explicit and vivid the homoerotic” and even for “promiscuous or illicit heterosexuality” (45, 46).

For writers a century earlier than Wilde, then, overt hints of homosexuality were off the table. Yet Sedgewick offers some insight as to how a Gothic writer like Lewis could identify and accommodate this limitation in his writing by (barely) obscuring the homosexuality implicit in Ambrosio’s attraction to Rosario/Matilda by limiting any sexual relations they have to the ostensibly heterosexual, thereby leaving Ambrosio’s action technically heterosexual. This is the trope of the “unspeakable” that forbids the very mention of homosexuality and exemplifies the internalization of homo*phobia* even among the authors concerned with combating it. Always, in such instances where it might appear, Sedgwick suggests “The manuscripts crumble at this point or are ‘wholly illegible,’ the speaker is strangled by the unutterable word, or the proposition is preterited as ‘at once so filed of horror and impiety, that, even to listen to it, is scarce less a crime than to comply with it’” (“Toward the Gothic” 94). In this way, authors avoided brushing too close to any discussion of homosexuality and thereby imply it by its conspicuous omission that it is more damning than the assaults, murders, and rapes they capitalize on. Even in *The Monk*, before Rosario may seduce Ambrosio, Rosario must conveniently metamorphose into a girl, and the character’s time as a boy must be pushed out of thought. The necessity of such narrative tactics to obscure homosexual content characterizes the eighteenth-century British public’s deep aversion to even the discussion of the matter.

This marks the literary emergence of the same claustrophobic exploration of sexuality which defined Lewis's own social climate. There is no room for characters to stretch their legs, walk around, make out, and eventually make heads or tails of the ins and outs of their sexuality. Despite this limitation, Rosario/Matilda assumes even greater masculinity while female-presenting, especially once their relationship with Ambrosio terminates. They become more authoritative and forceful toward the monk by giving orders to him and reprimanding his weakness. As Bersani's reading of western power dynamics would suggest, for Matilda to assume authority—and, therefore, masculinity—is to breach accepted cultural conventions and disturb ideas about gender roles. Either Matilda truly is Rosario, and thus a male imbued with masculine authority, or Ambrosio's own masculine authority over her is not the unshakable absolute the culture demands. In this way, Rosario/Matilda's mannerisms disrupt traditional heterosexual power dynamics and make evident Ambrosio's own hetero-divergent sexuality.

Lewis's choice of a monastic setting, however, affords the author a affords him a uniquely on-the-nose opportunity to parallel the homosexual's plight in society. Ambrosio finds himself surrounded by men in the monastery and constricted by a vow of celibacy that prevents him from exploring his sexuality with men or women. What is more, the same monastery which prevents him from accruing sexual experience and isolates him from the wider world is also his only means of defining his identity. Ambrosio is *only* a monk and is known *only* for his piety. His interests, dreams, and

hopes are largely obscured to readers and himself within a monastic setting that devalues these concerns.

Because his lifestyle does not accommodate the family unit, as it precludes having a spouse and children, and because he has been trained to resist empathy, Ambrosio's actions appear evil despite following the rules of his church. Lewis effectively translates the social restrictions and values imposed by deviating from heteronormative culture into a social construct, the church, which his contemporary readers both understood and mistrusted. Sedgwick similarly notes a particular set of traits linked to homosexuality in Lewis's period, "include[ing] effeminacy, connoisseurship, high religion, and an interest in Catholic Europe-all links to the Gothic" ("Toward the Gothic" 93). Using the Catholic Church as a prop for bad morality was an easy target in the late 1700s, but Ambrosio's simultaneous complicity with and deviation from Catholicism does its job. Readers are made to plainly see not only how the church's institutionalized death-grip on love helps to mold the monster but also how Ambrosio's love or Agnes's love cannot fit in their worldview.

Lewis draws attention to the church's restrictive power through Rosario/Matilda's false story[6] of their "sister" Matilda and the unjust treatment she received for her love. Rosario/Matilda's tale functions as a brief introduction to the circumstance surrounding their coming to the monastery without revealing their identity. Moreover, it forces

[6] Here, Rosario/Matilda appears to parody Jesus's use of parables to teach his followers. Where Ambrosio might have eluded Rosario/Matilda's machinations had they been upfront, the use of the story first convinces him of their logic and plays upon his experience of learning from the Bible.

Ambrosio and readers to weigh the value of following cultural values against the harm that would come from doing so. In the tale, they describe how their sister, Matilda, loved an already engaged but virtuous man, Julian, and, for love of him, entered domestic service to his betrothed and worked to please them both. Unfortunately, "She discovered herself. Her love grew too violent for concealment…In an unguarded moment She confessed her affection…believing that a look of pity bestowed upon another was a theft from what He owed to her… He forbad her ever again appearing before him. His severity broke her heart" (Lewis 88-89). Thus cast off, she left and died shortly after. The church, represented as Julian's wife, engenders innocent death by foreclosing Julian and Ambrosio's ability to love others. This concept privileges traditional, heteronormative male and female reproduction above all else and works "by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations" (Edelman 2). The story succeeds in eliciting Ambrosio's pity, and he deems the man, Julian, cruel for sending her away. While Rosario/Matilda's motives are evil, they work by exploiting an already extant fault in the culture and draw attention to the imperfection of the framework. Thus, Lewis primes readers to not only see the church and culture as the instigator of Ambrosio's plight but also intends readers should view, as Ambrosio is made to, such harsh regard for innocent love as barbaric.

It is unfortunate that he later connects Rosario/Matilda's tutelage with confusion and lies, both for his own sake and the sake of removing homosexuality from the

villainous trappings. Whatever tyranny the church might be guilty of, its juxtaposition against Rosario/Matilda and the devil's scheme necessarily kills the momentum behind Lewis's criticism. Indeed, readers are to understand by the end of the novel that any resentment against the church that Rosario/Matilda's story might evoke is part of an *actual* diabolic scheme. Nonetheless, the church as an obstacle to sexuality serves as a common motif for Ambrosio throughout the narrative, first as an impediment to love and later as a bulwark, though unsuccessful, against his continued criminality.

While the forced celibacy Ambrosio is faced with on pain of torture/execution/damnation if he deviates is a major issue, it is not Lewis's only jab at the church. Monasteries and convents were already supposed places for illicit sexual encounters, and by placing Ambrosio's debauchery at the heart of one, he calls readers' attention to such allegations. George E. Haggerty describes such institutions as "a precursor of the sexual laboratory" ("Horrors of Catholicism" par. 17), and it proves to be a space where the Gothic could easily hypothesize sexual transgression under the guise of horror. Most damning for the church and homosexuals alike is the implied pseudo-pederasty when Ambrosio's fatherly affection for young Rosario turns to asexual attraction for Matilda. As Clara Tuite argues, the Matilda figure seems only to veil the preexisting and already desired young man, Rosario, instead of dismissing this male guise as an illusion. Specifically, she "suggest[s]…that the homoerotic relationship established here between the Abbott and the Novice is specifically pedagogical and pederastic, the kind of relationship which Foucault has defined in *The Use of Pleasure* as a characteristic

homoerotic relationship between a younger and older man, based on an erotics of restraint, or 'self-denial'" (Tuite par. 11). Lewis devotes a full paragraph to Ambrosio's discovery of Rosario/Matilda's breasts amid his panic, shock, and confusion at learning her sex to exemplify the ineffectuality of policing desire. When she presses a poignard to her chest after having rent her own clothing so that the moonlight catches her exposed skin, he is transfixed by her "beauteous Orb" (Lewis 101-102), and his sudden arousal gives him the final push to allow her to stay. Though Ambrosio initially begs her to release him from his promise to allow her to remain, it is his unexpected encounter with his own lust that ultimately makes him pliable to her wishes. Even omitting the *homo*sexuality of their escapades at the monastery, Ambrosio coupling with the crossdressing Rosario/Matilda (out of wedlock to boot) and later raping his sister is a gross violation of the heteronormative social order. In creating a character whose *jouissance* necessitates the destruction of himself and everyone else, Lewis has prototyped Edelman's sinthomosexual while using the dominant social institution of the time, the church, to legitimize the monstrosity of his crimes.

Lewis's narrator's appraisal of Ambrosio is both complimentary of his innate character and reproving of the close-minded teaching of the monastery and institutionalized religion. Per Lewis, Ambrosio had great potential in life: "Had [Ambrosio's] Youth been passed in the world, He would have shown himself possessed of many brilliant and manly qualities. He was naturally enterprizing, firm, and fearless…There was no want of generosity in his nature… His abilities were quick and

shining, and his judgment, vast, solid, and decisive" (Lewis 359). Indeed, Ambrosio's high status and popular sermons at the opening of the novel exemplify his natural abilities, and he is, in the beginning, the jewel of his monastery for all his seeming abundance of virtue and skill. Ambrosio's early paternal affection for Rosario/Matilda similarly demonstrates his capacity for kindness, understanding, and humanity.

In the same passage that he notes Ambrosio's natural good qualities, Lewis explicitly blames the church's tutelage for their eventual purgation. Lewis writes that "His Instructors carefully repressed those virtues whose grandeur and disinterestedness were ill-suited to the Cloister. Instead of universal benevolence, [Ambrosio] adopted a selfish partiality for his own particular establishment" (360). Moreover, Ambrosio's cloistered life has left him virginal in more than the literal sense. His limited experience has rendered him naïve and disconnected from the pleasures and burdens that shape daily life, with only the rigid morality of the monastery to guide him. To borrow from 1 Corinthians, he "spake as a child," "understood as a child," and "thought as a child" (*King James Version*, 13.11). This leaves him easily confused and vulnerable to outside manipulations from Matilda, particularly when she comes guised as a pious member of his own monastery. Ambrosio, as their "Man of Holiness" (Lewis 28) and representative of his monastery, highlights the gulf between actual morality and the pretense of morality that licenses many of Ambrosio's crimes. He, like his organization, is characterized by victims like Agnes as "Proud, Stern, and Cruel" (76), where he should be compassionate. This develops into a recurring theme to explain his damnation. Lewis's monk, then, is

neither wholly a sinner nor a saint, but a person. Ambrosio and the church's criminality, though, do not initially produce an ill effect. Madrid is stable regardless of their abuses because Agnes is *technically* guilty of premarital sex, and the church is *technically* right if the people are willing to subscribe to the primacy of the church. More critically, in the near absence of his sexuality, Ambrosio is not yet a sinthomosexual. Still cut off from this part of his identity, he is not any sort of sexual. Thus, until he pursues his relationship with Rosario/Matilda, his crimes are not *villainous* by the standards of the narrative or socially aversive by those of the antisocial theory.

Ambrosio, under the ordinance of the church, is rendered non-reproductive, and his eventual sexual awakening leads him to follow the destructive, death drive-induced pattern of sinthomosexuals and embody their future-aversive morality. On this point, it is notable that Edelman and Lewis both grapple with the role and merit of compassion, the former arguing for the sinthomosexual's obligation to resist compassion as a force perpetuating a future in which they have no part. In fact, in suggesting "compassion confuses our own emotions with another's" (67), Edelman echoes Ambrosio's learnings at the monastery. When Ambrosio considers speaking with the Prioress on Agnes's behalf to amend his cruel treatment of her, he receives Rosario/Matilda's sharp reprimand and "resolved to drop the idea of interposing in her behalf" (Lewis 353). "Resolved" suggests active and willful participation in Edelman's call for the "hardening of the heart" against the pathos of others (67). The same sentiments which Edelman cheers in "Compassion's Compulsion" when Leonard of Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*

stomps Thornhill's fingers only to fall to his death instead, Ambrosio partakes of here. The similarity between Rosario/Matilda and the church's ideas suggests that the sinthomosexual's antisocial tendencies towards cruelty or heartlessness are not unique unto itself, but sinthomosexuals are simply the group which is penalized because they are cruel without social approval. Lewis's Ambrosio and Edelman's sinthomosexual are the villains after all, and any misfortune which befalls the villain is naturally justified if it preserves the good, heteronormative people.

In his rebuke of the church's unfairness, Lewis uses a representative of the virtuous but flawed layperson to explicitly condemn the false virtue much the same way Edelman decries such as it emerges in the twentieth century. In *The Monk*, as Ambrosio is turning over Agnes, she levels a curse against him that prophesies his coming hardships and the reasons for them. She cries:

> 'Man of an hard heart… You could have saved me; you could have restored me to happiness and virtue, but would not...You are my Murderer, and on you fall the curse…Insolent in your yet-unshaken virtue… where is the merit of your boasted virtue? What temptations have you vanquished? Coward! you have fled from it, not opposed seduction. But the day of Trial will arrive! Oh! then when you yield to impetuous passions! when you feel that Man is weak, and born to err; When shuddering you look back upon your crimes, and solicit with terror the mercy of your God, Oh! in that fearful moment think upon me! Think upon your Cruelty! Think upon Agnes, and despair of pardon!' (Lewis 76-77)

Agnes's curse specifically rebukes him for confusing avoiding sin as conquering it, and this issue defines two key problems for Ambrosio's sexual awakening. First, Lewis rejects the idea that those unfamiliar with temptation are fair judges of sin, and this necessarily carries over to any discussion of the morality or immorality of homosexuality. That is, while she is guilty of sexual misconduct herself, she warns Ambrosio and readers that they are in no position to pass judgment when they will similarly be guilty of wrongdoing at some point. Secondly, the curse emphasizes that his lack of mercy and inability to forgive her are far greater crimes than her own sexual misconduct.

What Lewis is posing to readers is a scathing indictment against false notions of virtue, morality, and purity as they are practiced in institutionalized religion, which would later become a recurring sentiment of queer theory. In exposing Ambrosio, the finished product of the monastery's teachings and emblem of their ideals, as a parody of the virtue he is thought to embody, Lewis negates the church's claim to moral authority. He crowns this clerical critique at the climax of the narrative when the masses rally against Agnes's abusers. Agnes, being both moral and flawed, is held up as a representative for the common folk. Like them, she is vulnerable to exploitation by those in power, and her fellow people ultimately rally behind her to overthrow their abusers. Mother St. Ursula, a good-hearted sister at Agnes's convent, discloses the unfortunate girl's apparent death in her cell, affirming that the Prioress, an emblem of her institution, "is a Murderess; That She has driven from the world, perhaps from heaven, an Unfortunate whose offence was light and venial; that She has abused the power intrusted

to her hands, and has been a Tyrant, a Barbarian, and an Hypocrite" (Lewis 535-36) causing the mob to burn the religious institutions. This indictment against both the morals and culture of society is by no means exclusive to Lewis's time or place. Indeed, George Haggerty's examination of the origins of the Gothic's anti-Catholic tendencies, including Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*[7] which Lewis is deeply indebted to, suggests, "the sexual hysterics and violently destructive abuse" as seen in both texts owes to "Sexuality and religion…inextricably bound in the cultural imagination" (par. 3). Edelman challenges the legitimacy of the same principles via the problematic placement of the sinthomosexual in his/her society.

Edelman's description of the sinthomosexual aptly parallels the trajectory of Ambrosio's life when constrained by the church and lured by Rosario/Matilda. The critic argues that the very nature of the sinthomosexual stands in opposition to "compassion, identification, love of one's neighbor as oneself" (Edelman 71). To be a member of this group is to shrug off the compassion that drives the heteronormative world in exchange for wholesale actualization of "the negativity, the cruel enjoyment, the *jouissance* of the 'neighborly love'…expressing the triumph of the death drive and reifying the fatality he always embodied"[8] (46). And this is not without reason. Like Lewis, the church feeds Edelman's concerns as he recalls that after Pope John Paul II called for homosexuals to

[7] Lewis not only borrows major themes of violence, aberrant sexuality, and grim setting but the names of two of his own characters, Theodore and Matilda.
[8] Edelman's is discussing Scrooge's sinthomosexual qualities early in A Christmas Carol, noting his strikingly antisocial and anti-child sentiments.

be “treated ‘with respect, compassion, and sensitivity’” he followed it with the caveat that the “‘homosexual persons who assert their homosexuality,’ who do not, that is, repress or deny their sexual orientation, suffer an ‘objective disorder.’ They possess what he called an ‘inclination . . . toward an intrinsic moral evil’” (89). The insistence on equating homosexuality with perversion and calling for the stifling of queer identity, at once confirms Edelman and Bersani’s fear of castration, sterilization, even obliteration of self within a culture opposed to his lifestyle and engenders the very deviation from traditional morals which he calls for. What reason has one to subject themselves to the (comparatively progressive) cultural morality which vilifies her or him? Moreover, without the possibility of moving outside the culture where this idea operates, how can one reconcile their identity to the world? For Edelman, the way is confirming the threat and allowing oneself to be defined against these morals. Thus, the sinthomosexual is very much like the villain of Gothic literature, and both are similarly the product of a villainizing social force.

Ironically, love, both bodily and spiritual, defines the battle for the villain/sinthomosexual. They may either comply with the heteronormativity of social law and live out a partial life with a partial identity or love as they are inclined and as they see everyone around them may. Having the wrong love is taken as evidence of more than mere sodomy; it is evidence to complete moral failing and a very real threat to the spiritual wellbeing of the public. Lewis and Edelman draw attention to this moral policing, its grounds, and its effects. Though their ideas diverge at points, they similarly

find the villain/sinthomosexual as an inevitable victim of the social order as those they are posed against.

This dichotomy between initial, inherent goodness and external corruption becomes central to Lewis's depiction of the villain's struggle. More than this, Ambrosio's rapid acceptance of and willingness to act on his sexuality shows that at least his sexual virtue was solely a construct of his surroundings and not something he could or would have practiced on his own. The monastery has deprived him of the ability to navigate and reconcile his sexuality as he might have if free of their restrictions but not truly corrected the supposed deviance. Celibacy as a lifestyle is not a choice *he* makes, but rather the church, and he rejects it when given the chance. Ambrosio is as much a man, with all the implicit urges, as any other character in the novel and is no more criminal than a kid with his first *Playboy*. Likewise, from a queer reading, Ambrosio is similarly cut off from any homosexual inclination by the same moral framework that repressed every other part of his sexuality. Nevertheless, it is the male figure of Rosario, not the female figure of Matilda, that first wins his affections, and it is through this sexually transformative body that he explores his deviation from strict heterosexuality. There is a violence in Rosario's shift to Matilda; a scene completed both by partial disrobing and the threat of death, which highlights the trauma of negotiating these less than ideal desires in such a restrictive setting.

In contrast to this violent veiling of hetero-divergent sexuality, Edelman has no need to obscure his discussion of homosexuality to avoid public censorship. He does not

require Lewis's monastic setting nor the veiling of sexuality to highlight the threat against *being* queer. Speaking from twentieth-century America, his premise openly rebels against the stifling, self-denying mold provided by a reproducing, future-oriented, heteronormative culture that admits the non-reproductive sinthomosexual only as a de-fanged (de-fagged) inversion of itself. Edelman's thesis points to the historical issue of the sinthomosexual in the Christian, patriarchal framework that has dominated modern western culture. Lewis can entertain all the homosocial relations he likes so long as he does not have sex with these men. Ambrosio can be loved by the masses so long as he is chaste. The queer has a place in society so long as he or she or they can pass and fall in line. Queerness produces an inconvenient disruption of society's "ostensibly coherent identity" (Edelman 24), and Edelman argues that pretending otherwise is as self-defeating as embracing the *jouissance* inherent to the sinthomosexual's role. In such a situation, the options boil down to rejecting a culturally enforced self-hatred or forfeiting features of everyday life (intercourse, femininity/masculinity, open dialogue about oneself). Bersani refers to such passive complicity with social mandates, be they homophobic or misogynistic, as "chimerically nonviolent ideals" ("Is the Rectum a Grave?" 222). The queer ought not need to cut off some aspect of their identities for the sake of a seamless integration into society. Ambrosio need not be celibate, and the queers need not pass to deserve an equal place in their community. Because in the real world this is so often not the case, Edelman stresses that queerness does not afford an identity but can only ever

serve to draw attention to futurism's "own inescapable failure, its encounter with the illusion of the future as suture to bind the constitutive wound" (26).

The symbolic order and its inevitable unsustainability which Edelman's sinthomes anticipate are both evident in *The Monk* when Ambrosio's relationship with Matilda does not destabilize society until he attempts to drag Antonia into it, and it is most damning when the discovery of his sexual aggression contributes to the public's anger at the church. Author and critics are united in calling attention to the role of authority, be it moral or political, in fearing and condemning the queer. Thus, to overturn the negativity Edelman sees as implicit in homosexuality, one would need to overturn the queerness of it and negate the distinction of hetero- and homonormativity. Or, to phrase it in terms of power, homosexuality must forfeit its capacity to challenge the status quo.

Even before it is coined as such by theorists, queer negativity is center stage when discussing the possibility of social acceptance. The key element of Edelman's argument, the one which accounts for Ambrosio's doom and the destructiveness implicit in the embrace of the *jouissance,* is the vocal, unabashed acceptance of homo*antagonism*. Within his framework, it is difficult to imagine the magical day where there is not only the complete dissolution of sexual discrimination but even the threat of such. He argues for the queer community to accept the demonized rendering of their sexuality as an aggressive, socially disruptive force and "refuse the insistence of hope itself as affirmation, which is always affirmation of an order whose refusal will register as unthinkable, irresponsible, inhumane" (Edelman 4). The devil tells Ambrosio as much:

"Was Purgatory meant for guilt like yours? Hope you that your offences shall be bought off by prayers of superstitious dotards and droning Monks? Ambrosio, be wise!" (Lewis 652). Yet, Edelman and Lewis are not the final authority on what it means to be queer and certainly are not the sole voices of what the queer community wants. For Lewis, the reality of persecution does not equate to the permanency of such, though the distant hope of acceptance is a qualified one at best. Even if it eludes Ambrosio, Lewis posits a distant Heaven waiting for those who choose morality as "Negotiating the Future" will further describe.

Mutable Villainy or Fixed Sinthomosexuality

Ambrosio is pegged as a villain from the beginning. His first close interaction with anyone in the novel is with Agnes and her outing to the Prioress, and, from there, he quickly sinks into debauchery, witchcraft, rape, murder, and ultimately selling his soul. This last crime is unique in that it suggests all his previous actions are, in fact, forgivable. Though the audience may find Ambrosio's sins difficult to stomach, Ambrosio's devil seems to feel that his victory is only assured when Ambrosio signs away his soul freely and with full knowledge of the implications. For Lewis's devil, Ambrosio is not beyond salvation or becoming good until he accepts his damnation. Thus, though God is noticeably absent from the narrative, the message of divine mercy remains in the novel and emphasizes the tragedy of losing hope in mercy extending to oneself. Despite his religious trappings, Ambrosio neither learns to practice mercy towards others nor hope for it for himself, and he owes his doom to this failing.

On the one hand, society confirms that Ambrosio cannot or does not deserve to be forgiven. Agnes, in her rage, tells Ambrosio not to hope for forgiveness for his later crimes because he turned her over to the Prioress. That is, in a biblical vein of thought, he will receive mercy in accordance with the mercy he shows others—per the Book of Matthew: "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (6.12). As Ambrosio looks back on this when Rosario/Matilda begins to tempt him, he exclaims, "Agnes…I already feel thy curse" (Lewis 105). Specifically, he acknowledges the weakness of his resolve and inability to resist Rosario/Matilda's wish to stay with him as they ply him with threats of suicide and flashes of their naked body. The combination of outside forces, Matilda's scheme, Agnes's curse, and the monastery's teachings push Ambrosio toward sin rather than springing from his own, innate vices. While his pride and mercilessness make him a largely unsympathetic figure, his crimes up to this point in the narrative are only those he has been coerced into committing (i.e., he is just as guilty if he does not turn Agnes in or if he allows Rosario/Matilda to commit suicide). Thus trapped, Ambrosio has little recourse but to sin in one manner or another and must plunge ever further into sin as Rosario/Matilda continues to work at him. His only alternative is to return to a purely monastic and stifling life that led him to this point in the first place.

Once imprisoned by the inquisition for murder and witchcraft towards the close of the novel, Ambrosio is wracked with fear. Don Raymond and his men caught him immediately after killing Antonia and still stained with her blood. This alone would prove sufficient for their conviction and execution. Indeed, after hearing of Matilda's

sentencing, “His dislocated limbs, the nails torn from his hands and feet, and his fingers mashed and broken by the pressure of screws, were far surpassed in anguish by the agitation of his soul and vehemence of his terrors” (Lewis 637) and rightfully so, for he is later told of his pending burning. When Rosario/Matilda appears to assist him, they cry to the monk, “Still dare you hope for pardon? Still are you beguiled with visions of salvation? Think upon your crimes…Think upon the innocent blood which cries to the Throne of God for vengeance, and then hope for mercy! Then dream of heaven…Absurd” (Lewis 644). He replies, perhaps with more conviction than he feels, “"Matilda, your counsels are dangerous: I dare not, I will not follow them… Monstrous are my crimes; But God is merciful, and I will not despair of pardon” (645). Lewis positions his villain so that he must weigh the severity of his crimes against the mercy of God and hope for more kindness than he showed Agnes, and, at first, he seems to. Neither Rosario/Matilda nor the devil will help him unless he renounces this one thread of hope, and, left alone with the magic book that will buy his freedom at the cost of his soul, he initially refuses their offer.

The last portion of *The Monk* can be characterized as a highly visual, overt battle between hope and fear. Of course, Ambrosio’s fear eventually gets the better of him, and he sells his soul, but Lewis proves in no uncertain terms that this was a mistake. Gloating, the devil tells him shortly before flinging him off a cliff that “Had you resisted me one minute longer, you had saved your body and soul. The guards whom you heard at your

prison door came to signify your pardon" (Lewis 661), thereby confirming that only Ambrosio's acceptance of evil consigned him to his fate.

Lewis does not disclose how Ambrosio's pardon by the church was won, but rather in the spirit of divine forgiveness which Ambrosio failed to understand or practice, he leaves it as a miracle beyond explanation. Per Sedgwick, "If we follow Freud in hypothesizing that such a sense of persecution represents the fearful, phantasmic rejection by recasting of an original homosexual (or even merely homosocial) desire, then it would make sense to think of this group of novels as embodying strongly homophobic mechanisms" ("Toward the Gothic" 91-92). The devil, unsurprisingly, is a homophobe. He mimes the authority of God but commands none of His power. Lewis's monastic setting, monk villain, and spiritual line of questioning invite a little further insight from the Bible whose themes inform the tension of the narrative. Psalm 103 is perhaps most relevant, stating, "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him" (103.9-10). Only when Ambrosio's fear of judgment outweighs his fear of God does he forfeit his soul, and his disbelief or failure to follow the church's doctrine calls into question how effectively such ideals are taught and practiced. Lewis simultaneously confirms that Ambrosio is ultimately evil and a threat to society and that this was not a quality inherent to his character. The sexually stifling setting of the monastery, the untenable social isolation which he did not choose, and the external

pressure the sexually liminal Rosario/Matilda applies as a catalyst all instigate and guide his sudden and terrible decline.

Further, if, as Lewis's devil asserts, Ambrosio is not truly a villain until the end, he is as much a victim as any other character of the novel. Ambrosio's crimes are no small thing; rape, incest, matricide, fratricide, and consorting with nothing less than the devil himself. There are few readers who would be inclined to show mercy to him. But the perversion of his sexual appetites is artificial and avoidable, and Lewis's emphasis on Ambrosio's potential goodness adds no small element of tragedy to his otherwise unsympathetic villain.

* * *

Why should the devil, or Lewis, bother with a Faustian bargain? Though Lewis himself was familiar enough with Faust, having translated a version himself, the inclusion of this narrative element suggests more piety on the author's part than many of the blasphemous passages in the novel would imply. Edelman's theory, at least, would suggest that the active surrender to the devil is an empty gesture. Within his framework, the sinthomosexual is already effectively damned by society. Thus, the devil's requirement that Ambrosio sign away his soul is itself an affirmation that he is, truly, not yet irrevocably damned. In fact, while the devil's scheme to damn Ambrosio and undermine the church through his downfall is well underway to succeeding, Rosario/Matilda confirms that they will not help him solely because she is "forbidden to assist a Churchman and a Partizan of God" (645). Thus, Lewis affirms that Ambrosio

retains his identity as a Christian and the protection entailed with it so long as he chooses. In this way, Lewis critically departs from the deterministic tendencies of Edelman's theory in suggesting that the individual, if unable to control society's views, still maintains control over how they will act. Lewis's sister, Sophia Shedden, wrote of her brother after his death, "I think that the most prominent of his good qualities was Mercy. This was the *moral* of his *Monk*, and He exemplified it himself in his conduct" (MacDonald 63). Indeed, though Ambrosio falls out of step with mercy and reproduces the sinthomosexual, Lewis's narrative reprimands the monk's lack of mercy by allowing his damnation and extends mercy to Agnes despite her indiscretions. Mercy does not bar suffering, but it does wait on those who seek it out.

For those without mercy to offer, Edelman constructs his concept of the sinthomosexual's relation to society with the understanding that what he proposes is not only impracticable but also unfeasible, much in the same way that it would be for Lewis attempting to be openly queer in the 1700s. His is the route of retaliation, and while the sanctioned executions may have ceased, the privately condoned, if subtle, suppression of the queer community lingers and needs correction. Yet, he deems the desire to resist the status quo as the "impossible project of a queer oppositionality that would oppose itself to the structural determinants of politics (Edelman 4), and, drawing attention to the illogicalness of destabilizing any attempt at identity or progress, revels in the simultaneous need to pose this resistance and have it fail. If Lewis is frustrated with the church's vice-like grip on society's sexuality, Edelman is no less disdainful of his

century's regard for homosexuality. Moreover, just as Lewis anticipates Ambrosio's destruction through his sexuality, Edelman absolutely asserts the queer "negativity opposed to every form of social viability" (9) and thereby queer exclusion from the social order. In this way, both author and theorist acknowledge an extant and possibly intrinsic friction between those who break heteronormative codes and the culture that enforces them. More troubling, both predict these sexual outliers' destruction and that of those caught in their wake. Edelman's sinthomosexuals are enemies to any and all representatives of the status quo. Their *jouissance* "derealizes sociality and thereby threatens… 'the total destruction of the symbolic universe'" (Edelman 45), and, in pitting themselves against sociability, they warp typical relationships with family, friends, lovers, and the wider society. This is best reflected in Edelman's particular modification to the nature of *jouissance*: that it carries on even to the point of pain or self-destruction. Queer desire, then, may be considered in Edelman's framework an entity that threatens the stability of those subjected to it. To read *The Monk* in light of Edelman's idea that "queerness embodies this death drive, this intransigent jouissance, by figuring sexuality's implication in the senseless pulsions of that drive" (27) render the text itself quite sensible. It is the literalization of death-inducing desire bent on self-defacement.

2. MOTHERS, LOVERS, AND OTHER ENEMIES

Ambrosio's life is defined largely by its lack. He suffers acutely from a lack of love, a lack of family, and a lack of basic, worldly experience. He has been robbed of family and sexual maturation, and this has left him with unfulfilled sexual appetites. Unsurprisingly, the same lack of experience the church imposes results in these appetites mutating and expressing themselves in more obscene ways than they might otherwise. Ambrosio's desire continuously orients itself against the viable and the healthy in his efforts to recover this missing piece of his self. Such a characteristic is actualized in Lewis's narrative as a mirror, almost an immoral compass, directing the monk's desires toward their most fatal mode of expression.

Among the magical workings and enchanted objects Lewis sprinkles throughout his narrative, perhaps the most interesting is Rosario/Matilda's "mirror of polished steel, the borders of which were marked with various strange and unknown characters" (Lewis 410) and its power to conjure the image of the wielder's obsession. As a mechanism for both gaining information and gratifying desire, this magic mirror proves to be a truly frightening, and ultimately fatal, temptation because in calling attention to the thing most desired, it further underscores its distance. Rosario/Matilda pronounces, "Amidst all my sorrows, amidst all my regrets for your coldness, I was sustained from despair by the virtues of this Talisman" (410). Such a tool, procured as it is by Rosario/Matilda's relations to the devil, makes it seem possible that anything might be gained if one is

willing to sacrifice themselves or, as Ambrosio shows, sacrifice others. Whatever glimmerings of happiness to be had from spying upon a hoped-for subject, the infernal source of the mirror assures readers that such a means is at once untrustworthy and harmful.

This chapter will look closely at the patterns of antagonism, particularly in the form of rejection and incoherence, that define the tension between sinthomosexuals and society. The sinthomosexual is the culture destabilizing and self-destructing counterpart to the heteronormative, mainstream society, and it exists as both the initial victim and eventual enactor of violence. In finding themselves "othered" by their sexuality, they are excluded from and hostile toward their world. Borrowing and adapting Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, particularly concerning mothers and their children, I will show how Ambrosio's circumstances preclude normal maturation. Lewis's use of the Madonna demonstrates the unfortunate link between Ambrosio's maternal loss and the image of his seducer, Rosario/Matilda, as an object of his fixation and sexual deviancy. The second section relies on Butler's gender performance theory to support my examination of the spirit of Rosario/Matilda as an embodiment of the death drive and figure of Ambrosio's own missing identity. Throughout the discussion, this thesis will draw attention to the reactionary, abjection-driven hostility that engenders Edelman's theory and Ambrosio's fate beginning with the fear of being confirmed as an outsider.

Monsters without Mothers

Ruth Bienstock Anolik rightly points out that "no woman is in greater peril in the world of the Gothic than is the mother. The typical Gothic mother is absent: dead, imprisoned or somehow abjected, to use the term that Julia Kristeva applies to that state of being, 'neither subject nor object'" (25). Radcliffe's Olivia in *The Italian* is secluded in a convent and her identity hidden for the bulk of the novel, Laurina of Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya* runs off with her lover and allows her daughter to become a monster, and Hippolita of Manfred's *The Castle of Otranto* passively accedes to the tyranny of her husband. In all instances, the mother's power over their children is checked or regulated, yet Lewis's Elvira is uniquely depicted as actively *and* diligently overseeing Antonia's upbringing for most of the novel. She becomes a true Gothic mother by way of her first child, her son Ambrosio, whom she lost to her father. According to Leonella, Antonia's aunt, "He had the cruelty to take from us my Sister's little Boy, then scarcely two years old, and whom in the abruptness of her flight, She had been obliged to leave behind her" (Lewis 20). Thus, Ambrosio's new life is begun by his family's abjection of him and his isolation from positive maternal influence.

Within the Gothic, familial presence, particularly the mother's, has the power to help or destroy the main characters, so it is no surprise that Ambrosio's separation begins his unhealthy relations with women. Anolik's review of Gothic motherhood looks closely at the threat of the law and patriarchal institutions poised against women, but her review of *The Monk* fails to consider a key aspect of Elvira's maternal dynamic. She describes

her as “the benevolent though intrusive mother of the eponymous Monk in Lewis's novel (1796) [who] is suffocated by her son during the course of the novel” (Anolik 26). Her reading focuses specifically on those maternal functions which Elvira is in a position to perform and excludes her unwilling participation in another of Anolik’s Gothic maternal modes: “subversion of patriarchy” (37). In resisting her father’s will and running away without her child, Elvira reluctantly follows in the footsteps of “The women themselves [who] reject the figure of the mother and motherhood and in doing so avoid the typical abjection of the Gothic mother” (Anolik 37), at least until she fulfills her duty of protecting Antonia and dies in the process. Setting aside Elvira’s innocence for losing her son, her willful abandonment nonetheless impaired Ambrosio’s natural maturation and rendered him part of Elvira’s own abjected self.

Edelman and Kristeva both discuss the issue of abjection, that force by which the subject undergoes disidentification, though on radically different terms. Within Kristeva’s theoretical framework, she posits the primary figure of abjection, the thing which is to be cast off in the preservation of selfhood, as none other than the mother. She conjures the image of a boy grappling with familial identity as “he drives them out, dominated by drive as he is, and constitutes his own territory, edged by the abject. A sacred configuration. Fear cements his compound…What he has swallowed up instead of maternal love is an emptiness, or rather a maternal hatred without a word for the words of the father” (Kristeva 5). The figure she describes has undergone the traumatic process of disentangling himself from the family and finding a sense of self. This is the normal

course of development, and out of it rises fear itself. Yet, in Edelman's rendering, "Those figures, sinthomosexuals, could not bring the Symbolic order to crisis since they only emerge, in abjection, to support the emergence of Symbolic form" (107). That is, the sinthomosexual is abjected by the social order and the world. Ambrosio, cast off as he was by Elvira, lacked the opportunity to abject his mother and was instead abjected, putting him squarely in Edelman's camp. Lewis's narrative privileges the perversion of the natural order and Kristeva's theory by producing Ambrosio's abjection only against Ambrosio and Elvira's wills. However, Elvira's considerations for him effectively disappear as she shifts her focus to her daughter and reinforces the permanency of this loss.

Readers are faced, then, with the tension between victims. Elvira is another victim of the Gothic's pattern of abjecting and destroying mothers per Anolik's analysis, yet Ambrosio, her destroyer, is as much a victim of abjection. Jenny DiPlacidi asserts, "Gothic texts by writers such as Matthew Lewis…rearticulate this subversion through a queering of desires that creates male victims of maternal desires or agency and disrupts cultural requirements of male dominance" (248). Though DiPlacidi's model emphasizes mother-son incest as the queerest and most subversive of the Gothic's sexual encounters, her broad review of Gothic sexual politics is well-grounded:

> the models of sexuality and power available in the Gothic allow writers not merely to rearticulate, but also to literalise the political structures of oppression through incest. Such literalisations subvert the structure of male power and

> dominance by revealing its dangers to the male and female bodies that do not conform to heteronormative ideologies of power and desire. (DiPlacidi 247-48)

Lewis's authorial choice for Ambrosio to disrupt the family unit that abjected him signals a fatalistic antagonism between them. Neither party is aware of their biological relations nor actively resentful of the other when Ambrosio strangles his mother in his failed attempt to rape Antonia. It is only fate that urges him on, a fate which is the literary enforcer of the death drive. Yet, Ambrosio is unwilling. He spends the first thirty years happily participating in social conventions and privately, unconsciously grappling with the missing part of himself. This, though, gives way to a peculiar blurring of his identity and desires, confusing familial and romantic love.

Edelman puts forth his challenge to the status quo, "What if…all those doomed to ontological suspension on account of their unrecognizable and, in consequence, 'unlivable' loves, declined intelligibility…or declined, more exactly, to cast off the meaning that clings to those social identities that intelligibility abjects" (106). He essentially supposes that the subject of that "suspension" may elect of his/her own accord to embrace or set aside their socially nonviable identity and its implications. Ambrosio, though, grappling blindly with desires he is barely conscious of, highlights the vulnerability of this abjected group to still further intelligibility. If the sinthomosexuals' identities are unintelligible, the affections and experiences they have been abjected from are as much or more so. In pursuit of *jouissance,* before the death drive has even openly

surfaced, Ambrosio begins to unwittingly seek emotional gratification via the only mother remaining to him—his nude portrait of the Madonna.

By conflating queer sexuality with monastic living in *The Monk*, Lewis portrays the inevitable emergence of sexual desire like a weed pushing up through the concrete. It wraps itself around both Ambrosio's need for emotional support and his pursuit of spirituality. Ambrosio's sexuality is shaped by denial of affection and isolation from the world, so it is no surprise that his avenues for sexual expression encroach on his few other outlets. Lewis poses the image of the Madonna throughout *The Monk* as an emblem of both virginity and its implied purity, and its prominence in the narrative supersedes that of God or Christ. Though she and her chasteness are upheld as spiritual ideals, he depicts Ambrosio's celibacy as an unnatural, ill-fitting restriction that contributes to both his sexual misconduct and destruction. Moreover, the Madonna substitutes not only for potential lovers but even for his own mother. In leaving her as his only possible mother, Lewis reasserts the hubris which characterizes and condemns Ambrosio. Lewis contrasts their virginity, using the Madonna as an emblem of moral uprightness and Ambrosio as an unwitting parody, to identify the psychic damage of living under an outwardly imposed identity. The failure of this identity owes both to its omission of common, beneficent experiences like having a mother and the rigidity of Ambrosio's role as a monk.

Lewis parodies the morality and divine love the church is meant to represent through Ambrosio's confused affinity/attraction for his naked portrait of the Madonna. Anolik cites Carolyn Dever's excellent summation of the Gothic mother's literary role as

"constructed as an emblem of the safety, unity, and order that existed before the very dangerous chaos of the child's Gothic plot. Gothic novels rely on fractured domestic structures in order to construct the erotic crises" (qtd. in 27). Where Ambrosio *thinks* he reveres the Madonna for her purity and virtue, the language he uses instead objectifies and sexualizes a figure renowned for her virginity. Ambrosio turns his thoughts to the portrait, reflecting, "I must accustom my eyes to Objects of temptation, and expose myself to the seduction of luxury and desire. Should I meet in that world which I am constrained to enter some lovely Female, lovely...as you, Madona [sic]...!'" (Lewis 63). He goes on to detail the qualities in "the Object" which he esteems, including the gracefulness of "the turn of that head," "sweetness…in her divine eyes," "the blush of that cheek," "the whiteness of that hand," "those golden ringlets," and "that snowy bosom" (63). He consciously weighs the possibility of making love with her against "the reward of my sufferings for thirty years" (salvation) (63). Lewis's linguistic tactic, after reminding the reader of Ambrosio's arrogance and vanity, confuses his supposed morality with language overtly colored by lust.

Ambrosio would dream "the image of his favourite Madona, and He fancied that He was kneeling before her: As He offered up his vows to her, the eyes of the Figure seemed to beam on him with inexpressible sweetness. He pressed his lips to hers, and found them warm" (Lewis 104). Her power over him then seems more masculine, not a response to maternal rule but a willing subjugation to her beauty. Indeed, she commands all the patriarchal authority of the church itself and, in this way, defies traditional division

of power along the lines of sex. She is, then, a holy figure to turn to, motherly in her authority, but also not his mother and sexualized as a result. Further, the proximity to the Madonna, and thereby morality—which he believes he has at this time—is overturned by the eventual revelation that the portrait is that of Matilda. In the same vein, understanding that Rosario/Matilda's comment must be tongue-in-cheek given her plot for his damnation, the remark that "Tis Religion, not Beauty which attracts his admiration; 'Tis not to the Woman, but the Divinity that He kneels" (Lewis 104) may be understood to mean the inverse.

The Madonna as lover simultaneously suggests the failure of religious trappings to quell sexuality and the significance of the absent mother's impact on Ambrosio's development. Rosario/Matilda is made all the more insidious for compounding her liminal gender presentation and youth with the likeness of the Madonna. For Ambrosio to sleep with this demonic figure evokes the most dreadful blasphemy and the greatest sense of the death drive. In his pursuit of *jouissance,* the monk unwittingly rebels against God directly by violating the image of the Virgin Mother and underscores the brutality of the death drive and the full force of self-negation that the sinthomosexual represents.

In fact, the plot of *The Monk* turns out to be the product of the devil's machinations. Having sealed his contract, the devil exclaims, "Know, vain Man! That I long have marked you for my prey: I watched the movements of your heart; I saw that you were virtuous from vanity, not principle, and I seized the fit moment of seduction" (Lewis 660-61). In this way, the spirit legitimizes something like an Edelmanian

supposition of the queer's inherent negativity. Edelman argues that if there is to be a negation of futurism, "the blame must fall on the fatal lure of sterile, narcissistic enjoyments understood as inherently destructive of meaning and therefore as responsible for the undoing of social organization, collective reality, and, inevitably, life itself" (13). Ambrosio fulfills this very thing under the devil's guidance, and the spirit, then, may be understood as the literary manifestation of the death drive. So powerful is this figure that it usurps the place of God in the narrative. While at first it appears that a divine messenger has come to help Elvira save her daughter, the devil reveals, "it was I who warned Elvira in dreams of your designs upon her Daughter, and thus, by preventing your profiting by her sleep, compelled you to add rape as well as incest to the catalogue of your crimes" (Lewis 661). Rosario/Matilda, then, as the devil's instrument, is the key to understanding the psychological forces guiding Ambrosio.

Symbols of the Surfacing Death Drive

Rosario/Matilda has proven central to the majority of criticism centered on *The Monk* with good reason. This character's inexplicable liminality speaks to questions of identity that eighteenth-century England was ill-equipped to answer even as the decidedly destructive bent of the demon's goals points toward their true nature as a shadow of Ambrosio's and Lewis's damaged psyche. The religious thematics such a figure plays along are inseparable from the conversation, given Christianity's hold over the discourse at the time *The Monk* emerged. Rosario/Matilda, freakish demon that they are, exemplifies the issue of "Sex, gender, and sexuality: three terms whose usage relations

and analytical relations are almost irremediably slippery" (*Epistemology of the Closet* 27). They evoke the mutability of the terms even down to the biological and spiritual levels and call into question the fixity of the ideas that western culture is built upon.

This section relies on Butlerian gender theory to trace the expression of Ambrosio's abjected self through Rosario/Matilda and identify the homophobic and transphobic qualities of their portrayal. In doing so, I will highlight the eighteenth-century culture's antipathy for sexual diversity and how Lewis anticipates such as an ultimately destructive quality. Moreover, I will demonstrate how sinthomosexual sentiments are a natural byproduct of exclusory social practices.

Criticism of *The Monk* in the mid-twentieth century, predating Sedgwick, Edelman, Butler, or Kristeva's rise in queer theory, nonetheless picks up on a central theme to Rosario/Matilda's character: incoherence. Peter Grudin draws attention to the split in critical discourse over the apparent inconsistencies in the novel, including the questionable origin of the Madonna's portrait and the portentous intervention of the snake biting Ambrosio and ensuring Rosario/Matilda's place at the monastery. Yet, Grudin notes that she "sucks forth the venom and thus introduces the poison into her own system. Once Ambrosio learns of this sacrifice, and that he must both become her lover and endorse her appeal to Satan in order to save her, gratitude becomes the irresistible rationalization for lust" (138). If so mysterious a character is difficult to pin down, it does not mean they are not methodical. Inscrutability is the very substance of Rosario/Matilda's identity, and indeed, Peter Grudin plainly asserts what becomes clear

only at the close of the novel: “Matilda's intrinsic role in this process, and her strange abandonment of a lover won with such labor and art, suggest that her interest is not in the man, but in his perdition” (139). More than this, though, is Lewis’s fatalistic implementation of a revenge fantasy with Ambrosio striking out against the mother who abandoned him and the sister who enjoyed a normal life all without realizing it. Murder and rape are awful crimes, but the underpinning violence against the family unit suggests a sexual motivation on Lewis’s part that requires first understanding Rosario/Matilda as the instigator of this violence and then applying queer interpretations of sexuality to clarify this incoherence.

Rosario/Matilda’s nature as a symbol and a pervasive force rather than a true character is best understood beginning with the end of *The Monk*. The devil, having concluded his schemes to entice Ambrosio, informs the former monk that he “bad [sic] a subordinate but crafty spirit assume a similar form, and you eagerly yielded to the blandishments of Matilda” (Lewis 661). The Matilda identity, then, proves no truer than the spirit’s disguise as Rosario. Moreover, the spirit itself ultimately remains unnamed and undefined and can be understood as a manifested symbol of Lewis’s sexuality. Even when “She assumed a sort of courage and manliness in her manners and discourse but ill-calculated to please him” (Lewis 353), it appears to be a further manipulation rather than a return to Rosario/Matilda’s natural character. For this reason, the character is regarded by this thesis not as a person but as an extension of Ambrosio’s Butlerian gender performance and as a liminal entity composed of diverse personalities. Each performance

is true in the sense that they are performed for the express purpose of appealing to Ambrosio and playing off his own nature. Or, more simply, Matilda mirrors Ambrosio's mental landscape and adapts to better bring about his sexual liberation, albeit for evil motives.

The monastic setting, more than simply impeding sexual growth, reproduces the stifling categorization of the human identity in clear-cut, fixed shapes. Sedgwick reminds readers that the "implications of homo/heterosexual definition took place in a setting, not of spacious emotional or analytic impartiality, but rather of urgent homophobic pressure to devalue one of the two nominally symmetrical forms of choice" (*Epistemology of the Closet* 9). Prior to this, the option of divergent sexual identity was unavailable to western culture. Yet even the new binary is insufficient to fairly represent the diversity of the human condition and Ambrosio's shifting behavior and desire over the course of the novel[9]. Ambrosio transitions from a traditional masculine authority to become increasingly submissive and by his feminine passivity evokes the tone of the "sodomite" even without penetration. Even his initiation into sexuality is predicated on him submitting to Rosario/Matilda's advances and her adopting masculinity or femininity in compliment to his own shifting behaviors.

[9] Haggerty observes the weaponization of "the labels sodomy and sodomite …to regulate various behaviours—sexual, political, religious, social—and indicates that their usefulness for early "fathers" of the church stemmed from their flexibility…sodomy has never been just one thing in the Western cultural imagination, any more than its use has promoted one sexual practice to the exclusion of all others" ("Horrors of Catholicism" par. 12).

Rosario/Matilda, then, figures into Lewis's narrative as an incarnation of Ambrosio's own abjected self, being a product of multitudinous impulses and frustrations congealing into a single, liminal form with the sole purpose of disrupting the stability of his identity. In being tailored to his character, they not only mirror him as he is but define the terms of his (unhealthy) maturation. Rosario/Matilda, a conjured spirit shaped to better tempt Ambrosio, is comparable to what Butler calls:

> the spectres of discontinuity and incoherence, themselves thinkable only in relation to existing norms of continuity and coherence, are constantly prohibited and produced by the very laws that seek to establish causal or expressive lines of connection among biological sex, culturally constituted genders, and the "expression" or "effect" of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through sexual practice. (23)

Certainly, the appeals Rosario/Matilda makes to Ambrosio are tailored specifically to enticing him toward the socially and sexually unacceptable. They figure the gender and sexuality otherwise unexpressed in Ambrosio and assume the shape he forfeits. The Butlerian model would suggest that Rosario/Matilda, as an extension of Ambrosio, calls attention specifically to those parts of the monk which strict social order had abjected in his grooming. They are alluring when he is sexually desirous, meek when he takes charge, and self-possessed when he quibbles, thereby shifting and complimenting his own evolving psyche. Rosario/Matilda's efforts to gratify Ambrosio's suppressed desire reveal them to be Butler's product of prohibition, the tangible and argumentative

counterforce to the social order. Thus, as Ambrosio adopts different manners for different occasions, sometimes a monk or a man or a villain, Rosario/Matilda performs the part he leaves off, which, rather than recreating the binary, highlights the variance of gender and sexuality in one person.

A key example of their dynamic is the shift of sexual interests as he is seduced, loses interest, and is eventually refused Rosario/Matilda's sexual company even as his descent into perversion remains uninhibited. The monk, for Rosario/Matilda's sake, "forgot his vows, his sanctity, and his fame… remembered nothing but the pleasure and opportunity" (Lewis 140). Despite this, he eventually reflects that "Matilda gluts me with enjoyment even to loathing, forces me to her arms, apes the Harlot, and glories in her prostitution. Disgusting!" (369). This comes as no surprise and certainly does not signify any moral correction. Where he once gave himself quite excitedly over to lust, the externalization of his desire in Rosario/Matilda renders his appetite briefly sated by its attainment before turning still fouler. Their relationship calls to attention the performativity of gender as the non-binary spirit repeats or, as Butler dubs it, parodies heterosexuality. Indeed, Butler argues, "The parodic replication and resignification of heterosexual constructs within nonheterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called original, but it shows that heterosexuality only constitutes itself through a convincing act of repetition" ("Imitations and Gender Insubordination" 380). Even setting aside the Rosario aspect of Matilda and reading the figure as strictly feminine, the relationship still defies heterosexual requirements as the

non-binary spirit has only assumed a drag femininity, even femaleness, and convinced their partner otherwise. This in itself evokes queer negativity by drawing attention to the failures of traditional sexuality to account for variance. They prove undeniably and willfully antagonistic towards social structures not because they are sincerely expressing their own liminality but because they spitefully perform sex and gender to undermine another person's stability. Rosario/Matilda thus prove their own homophobia and transphobia by weaponizing them, and this similarly highlights the phobic nature of the text. Lewis's own uncertainty about sexuality, particularly if sexual difference equates to moral failure, seems to flavor Rosario/Matilda by making them demonic and destructive rather than merely otherworldly or unfixed.

Obviously, with the incestuous and homicidal bent of their guidance, Rosario/Matilda is not the clean expression of identity Butler suggests might come about in a society freed from compulsory heterosexuality. Rather, they appear in spite of its strict hold and stunted by the conditions under which they emerge. Butler rejects such conditions as "The construction of the law that guarantees failure [a]s symptomatic of a slave morality that disavows the very generative powers it uses to construct the "Law" as a permanent impossibility" (*Gender Troubles* 73). The very fact that Rosario/Matilda is characterized as an invader, witch, and demon at different points of the novel is indicative of the eighteenth century's stunted approach to sexuality. They express the same notion as Edelman, that cultural blight which Edelman captures in a quote from Father Miller, author of *Called by Love*: "'Mistaken compassion must not allow us to 'grant' civil rights

to gays We have every natural, God-given right to discriminate against immoral, unhealthy, ugly, society-disturbing behavior'" (91). There is no route for Lewis to propose a departure from the moral framework he is writing in without it taking on blasphemous or malicious connotations, and this forecloses a discussion of Ambrosio's exact sexuality. The reader cannot know where Ambrosio's "attract[ion] towards the Youth" ends and where his lust for the "Dangerous Woman!," Matilda, begins (Lewis 66, 341). Moreover, if his sexual interests are not quite fixed, his gender is no easier to pin down. Certainly, Ambrosio identifies as male and masculine, but this is undercut by his previously described display of traits which he described as feminine. Under the influence of this other half, the apparent fixedness of his sexual and gendered identity recedes and is replaced with anxiety. In this way, Ambrosio buts up against this society in much the same way as the author who penned him. Jerrold E. Hogle suggests "Lewis is… the ambivalent closet-gay outsider struggling to be and not be what he is" (par. 9). Both Lewis and Ambrosio must similarly grapple not only with personal convictions, but also with the risk of losing the comforts of their public lives. For Ambrosio to lose his place as a religious leader, moral authority, and unimpugnable man is to forfeit the power and protection he previously enjoyed through the religious and patriarchal culture.

Lewis sets up a moralistic variation of the very binary that Butler critiques via the premise of salvation and damnation, defined as it is for Ambrosio along the lines of sexual identity. The church/government/culture, like Butler's description of compulsory heterosexuality, "sets itself up as the original, the true, the authentic" ("Imitation and

Gender Insubordination" 378) and suggests that deviation from its mandates necessarily signifies a departure from the correct mode. Hogle echoes this in his reading of *The Monk* as a narrative playing out capitalist ideals, remarking, "Lewis shows with great force how…visceral desires gain their direction and objects from simulacra of counterfeits that cannot fulfill the self-completions they claim to offer their worshipers" (par. 6). He shows how desire becomes encapsulated in images, like Rosario/Matilda, which imitate without offering long term gratification. The false binaries of morality, sexuality, and sociality combine to apply psychic pressure and rupture the stability of their subject and one another.

The choice of salvation by setting aside one's pleasure or damnation for embracing taboo desire parallels the false dichotomy enforced by what Butler terms the "phantasmatic ideal of heterosexual identity, one that is produced by the imitation of its effect" under the belief that it performs the original mode ("Imitation and Gender Insubordination" 378). She argues it is impossible to perfectly occupy the stable and fixed sexual category as people's identities defy easy categorization. Lewis similarly contrasts the reality of human fallibility and the diversity of identity with the strict, decidedly culturally originating conception of the law. Under Butler's concept of coalitional politics:

> Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time. An open coalition, then, will affirm identities that are alternately instituted and relinquished according to the purposes at hand; it

> will be an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure. (*Gender Trouble* 22)

For Ambrosio, though, the possibility of easy transition between states and behaviors is obstructed by the limitations of codified roles. The concept of salvation and damnation weaponizes fear to enforce the binaries which Ambrosio fails to adhere to. Butler's model of gender performance, then, defines the nature of the tension between Ambrosio and the world. If the exploitation of socially constructed identity is the means by which Rosario/Matilda seduces Ambrosio, and the same social frame engenders the tension between repression and desire that weighs on Ambrosio, it would suggest that the culture is the original and chief antagonist of the novel. That is, the devil and Rosario/Matilda only prey upon Ambrosio via the channels of self-exploration which the social climate had previously blocked.

For this reason, Rosario/Matilda not only represents the surfacing of repressed gender and sexual identity, but also a psychological push toward a future escape from an untenable social construct. This push, of course, is the all-defying death drive. Edelman borrows Suzanne Barnard's explanation of the death drive's role: "while desire is born of and sustained by a constitutive lack, drive emerges in relation to a constitutive surplus. This surplus is what Lacan calls the subject's 'anatomical complement,' an excessive, 'unreal' remainder that produces an ever-present jouissance" (qtd. in 10). While Ambrosio's desire is rooted in his sexual non-fulfillment, Rosario/Matilda is that

negative, *jouissance* producing force that negates the social, moral, and political constructs which engendered the deficit. Within the scope of Edelman's discourse of futurity, such a figure is the future-antagonizing force. Because Ambrosio can have no part in heterosexual reproduction within the confines of the monastery, he has no future, but even the act of having sex with Matilda must prove future-aversive because of his profession. Thus, Ambrosio is confronted with the reality that both passive compliance and subversive action will equally ensure his destruction.

Kristeva's concept of abjection requires the cordoning off of the self in the "process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death" (3) and proves key to understanding how Ambrosio inverts this principle to recover parts of himself which were abjected by others. If Butler's revision of gender and identity allows readers to interpret Ambrosio's shift in manner and identity as a matter of performance suited to the situation, Kristeva shifts the discussion to how we negotiate the boundary between acceptance and rejection. In Lewis's case, his commingling of as many crimes as he could manage with his discourse on sexual exploration serves Kristeva's point exactly: "The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior. . . . Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility" (4).

* * *

The Monk plays off its own unintelligibility and that of sex, gender, and sexuality to create a chain of antagonism. The mother abjects the son, and, in the son attempting to recover this lost part, becomes his enemy and his sexual object. The Madonna becomes the bridge for maternal, spiritual, and sexual gratification until arriving at Rosario/Matilda and being recognized as the failed and perverse attempt to build relationships. Rosario/Matilda acts out Ambrosio's desire in its most unhealthy and self-destructive form, the product of the cultural climate that bred the rest of the antagonism. Thus, the culture which first obstructed the hetero-divergent individuals unwittingly goes about producing Edelman's sinthomosexuals by complicating their attempts at building healthy relationships with their family and peers. The fear permeating the narrative as it acts out the structures put forth by Kristeva, Butler, and Edelman to illustrate the psychological pressures suggests that the constructs are at least partially colored by queer panic.

Figment of Ambrosio's damaged psyche and emblem of destruction though they may be, Rosario/Matilda offers Ambrosio advice that echoes so many queer theorists: "To them who dare nothing is impossible. Rely upon me, and you may yet be happy" (Lewis 404). In Edelman's call to embrace *jouissance* through the death drive or Jack Halberstam's challenge to engage a new, feminist frenzy, there is a sentiment of rejecting the tired and restrictive framework that first produced myriad phobias of women, sex, desire, and similarity. Even Jose Esteban Muñoz, with his future-engaging premise of hope, argues for a proactive approach to amending a society that has precious little room

for the yet not-fully-realized queer community. For all those whose anatomy and desire have forced an investment in this discourse, Ambrosio's own upbringing may resonate: "It was by no means his nature to be timid: But his education had impressed his mind with fear so strongly, that apprehension was now become part of his character" (Lewis 359). Fear and frustration with fear have done much to define the discourse on how to combat prejudice, and most of the answers are lackluster. Edelman's willingness to embrace the extremes of right-wing homophobia requires us to "refuse the insistence of hope itself" (4) and Halberstam affirms his theory "will not be your salvation" (28). Regardless of the very real merit of their arguments, one must consider the practical viability of implementing them further when the *actual* future is at stake.

The future Edelman and like-minded critics so oppose is that which is the fixed and inevitable result of clinging to traditional moral and political discourse, to party lines and institutions, which have previously and continue now to fail them. When he agrees with Donald Wilmon's assertion that "Acceptance or indifference to the homosexual movement will result in society's destruction by allowing civil order to be redefined and by plummeting ourselves, our children and grandchildren into an age of godlessness [that] the very foundation of Western Civilization is at stake" (qtd. in Edelman 16), Edelman acknowledges that for there to be a place for queer acceptance the social order would need to be radically revised. Until such a point, the queer community can only stand in opposition of those structures proven to reject them.

3. NEGOTIATING THE FUTURE

Despite all the odds, Lewis maintains that Ambrosio had a chance at life and salvation. If the devil, the same fatalistic force which drives Ambrosio to forfeit his happiness, is telling the truth—that the inquisition is coming to release him, and Ambrosio still has a claim to his soul which only his signature could remove—then there is still hope for him to live physically and spiritually until he gives it up. The tension between these two ideas, fatalistic damnation and distant salvation, are inherently at odds. Either the destructive impulse of the death drive is an absolute condition of hetero-divergent sexuality, or it must be the learned and malleable product of social conditioning.

In the recorded minutes of "The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory," a conference debate held just over two hundred years after Lewis published *The Monk*, Lee Edelman maintains that "Neither liberal inclusionism, with its ultimate faith in rational comprehension, nor the redemptive hope of producing brave new social collectivities can escape the insistence of the antisocial in social organization" (821). This devil has not been exorcised from the queer psyche. That is, Edelman supposes nothing is going to magically vanish the diminished status of "other" from the social equation nor transmute them into something more widely palatable. Instead, he argues, "structurally determinative violence" shapes society (Edelman 821). Queers are the antagonists, the thing against which society must define itself.

This chapter begins with a look at Lewis's and Edelman's similar expectations for queer interaction with the Child symbol, the mainstream symbol of futurity in western culture, and especially how they anticipate mutual destruction. Following this, I will read the character of Theodore, a servant to Raymond in *The Monk*, as a type of figure who bridges between the heteronormative and hetero-divergent factions. Theodore embodies an early attempt at producing the queer futurity, a notion or an idea that theorists like Muñoz are still hopeful for. I will show how Lewis's anticipation ultimately confirms the legitimacy of Edelman's concerns about the Child symbol and sinthomosexual's antagonistic relationship but also suggests that such a tension need not define them and may, in fact, be overturned in ideal circumstances.

Child Versus Sinthomosexual

Edelman's Child symbol is the focal point of political investment and the future beneficiary—or victim—of present actions. It encapsulates the notions of a preserved people and culture which are to be hoped for. Perpetually unspoiled, it commands the sympathy, affection, and loyalty of all who subscribe to this political model. Antonia, Ambrosio's sister, is Lewis's own Child symbol and steeped deeply in both virtue and innocence. With her whole, unspoiled life ahead of her, she is the very image of Edelman's theoretical Child around which heroes and politics alike must converge and, in whose service, all fear-provoking villains must be routed. Despite her goodness, Antonia emerges as an instance of this fatal antagonist of the queer community, itself the victim of homophobic, western culture. In invoking a "for the children" politics that alleges to

emphasize their safety, both Lewis and Edelman's social models visualize the cyclic antagonism of the political structure. Edelman's asserts that the "Child [which] remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention" (Edelman 3) and in whose name the queer community is to be feared as a perverse and degenerate threat, constitutes a theoretical whetstone. It must, by virtue of its invocation, sharpen queer knives and leave them poised to attack within the framework Edelman lays out and which Lewis performs in his narrative. The Child symbol is at once the intended victim of queer negativity and, though unacknowledged by Edelman and other queer theorists discussing child-politics, the subject of deep envy for its privileged position in the world.

Early in *The Monk,* Antonia and her aunt meet a gypsy woman in the street who relays to them surprisingly accurate prophesies of their futures. While her aunt receives only a jesting reprimand for her vanity, Antonia's fortune legitimizes all the enmity between villain and heroine, sinthome and child, which Edelman believes. The woman tells the "lovely maid" Antonia that though she is "Chaste, and gentle, young and fair,/ Perfect mind and form possessing," and "would be some good Man's blessing" (Lewis 59), she is doomed to fall prey to "Lustful Man and crafty Devil" (59). It is particularly interesting, if somewhat obvious, that while the man, Ambrosio, is intrinsically linked to the devil, Antonia is assured her "Soul must speed to heaven" (59) in a clear cut delineation of good and evil. Young girl good: sexually repressed monk with no outlet for any of his anxieties bad. In perpetuating this most basic premise of the hetero-divergent

"other" as the natural and true opposition to goodness and futurity, Lewis credits and strengthens the homophobia implicit in the narrative. Jerrold E. Hogle calls this "the apparent drawing of a definite cultural line between 'good' and 'bad' desire, leaving some of Lewis' own desires on the 'bad' side" (par. 10). Antonia's impending and unavoidable death justifies political sanctions against sinthomosexuals who challenge "That figural Child [who] alone embodies the citizen as an ideal, entitled to claim full rights to its future share in the nation's good" (Edelman 11), yet the narrative and theory which maintain the universality of this relationship may themselves be largely the byproduct of a paranoid understanding of the situation.

Neapolitan gentleman and bystander, Don Lorenzo, enamored, looks on this same girl and thinks, "What a Seraph's head presented itself to his admiration… from sweetness and sensibility of Countenance…She appeared to be scarcely fifteen…She looked round her with a bashful glance…Her cheek was immediately suffused with blushes" (Lewis 18). It can hardly be supposed that his attraction is any less physical than Ambrosio's. The language is charged not only by Don Lorenzo's sexual attraction, but by a general sense of her own nascence and vulnerability. To rob her of that smile, to show her a world more confusing and harsher than she has yet seen, is an almost unthinkable crime. Antonia's initiation into adulthood is the very thing to guard her against, yet her introduction to these horrors follows closely on Ambrosio's heels and under his direction, for, as Edelman sums it up: "queerness… bring[s] children and childhood to an end" (20).

If Don Lorenzo and Ambrosio are similarly united in their mutual attraction to Antonia, it is interesting that only the latter's interest is criminalized. Certainly, Don Lorenzo would be an unlikely character to force himself on the young girl, but how different are his motives from Ambrosio's in reality? Rosario/Matilda challenges Ambrosio, "Are you not planning the destruction of innocence, the ruin of a creature whom he formed in the mould of angels?" (Lewis 407), but in this Child symbol, the mere act of sexual interest must be suspect. When Elvira chastises Antonia that "Lorenzo is the Heir of the Duke of Medina Celi. Even should Himself mean honourably, his Uncle never will consent to your union" (314), she calls attention to the artificiality of their social order. Don Lorenzo is desirable not just because he is good but because he is of the upper class. Antonia's worth, likewise, is lessened by her poverty. The veil of innocence is merely a convenient pretext for measuring the worth of the suitor, and one can be "honorable" if they are of proper status. Ambrosio, meanwhile, is rendered deviant despite his good qualities precisely because his rank renders him socially and sexually unfit. Even the incestuous element of the relationship is a non-entity at this point, for it has not been disclosed and cannot be a point of objection. Ambrosio is frankly creepy here with his stalkerish tendencies to visit the sick Elvira at her home and use the pretext of ministrations to be near Antonia, but Don Lorenzo's sexual appetites are no less extant than his own and produce no different results.

Ambrosio's deviancy and Don Lorenzo's nobility reveal themselves to be byproducts of a social order intent not so much on regulating sexuality but power, and the

Child symbol is merely another facet of this. If we take Ambrosio's monastic trappings to be a substitution for homosexuality as "a descriptive category of lived experience" ("Toward the Gothic" 87), it fits neatly into Sedgwick's argument that homosexuality established "the terms of a newly effective minority oppression…[and] that a new and immensely potent tool had become available for the manipulation of every form of power that was refracted through the gender system-that is, in European society, of virtually every form of power" (87). Lewis's Child symbol is herself only too enamored with the qualities of this man-made predator, for Antonia happily remarks, "He listened to me with such an air of kindness and attention! He answered me with such gentleness, such condescension! He did not call me an Infant, and treat me with contempt" (Lewis 380). That is, he demonstrates those good qualities which he naturally possesses and veils from her the more perverse desires which themselves only arise from their inability to be acted upon. Readers see where normative human desire meets a body of politics which, though supposedly good, victimizes some of those who wish to participate. Trust breaks down because the system fails to make a place for people like Ambrosio. Thus, in the absence of healthy avenues for sexual expression—and therefore a future worth investing in—the death drive gains a primacy it would otherwise lack. Had Ambrosio the leisure of courting her as Don Lorenzo does, his sexual frustrations might never have developed and likely would not take on the deviant qualities they find under Rosario/Matilda's tutelage. Instead, his experiences are colored by a pervasive fear of being sexual, being, caught, being evil, and being damned. Certainly, Lewis's text makes frequent use of the

same images of God, demons, and corpses that are central to Sedgwick's own crucial discussion of queer fear.

Such a fear is not exclusive to the Gothic, however. Sedgwick's discussion beyond purely Gothic texts to the general queer response to society acknowledges our own fallibility, our capacity for projecting the shadow of fear over any reading. "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay is about You," in addition to alluding to a certain queer disposition for self-involvement, is her fun and gentle chastisement of reflexive return to paranoia-colored critique as opposed to "[viewing it] as one kind of cognitive/affective theoretical practice among other, alternative kinds" (Sedgwick 126). That is, where Edelman stops at and affirms the absolute terminal point of queer negativity, Sedgwick and later critics drawing from her opt for the antihomophobic stance that "paranoia is a uniquely privileged site for illuminating not homosexuality itself…but how homophobia and heterosexism work— in short, if one understands these oppressions to be systemic, how the world works" ("Paranoid Reading" 126). Her challenge to the queer discourse's tendency to flock to negativity opens the possibility of looking instead toward a means of opting out of reflexive self-castigation.

The battle lines of child versus sinthomosexual, Antonia versus Ambrosio, culture versus queer, are enforced only by the homophobic mentality that draws up the clear-cut, neatly arrayed categories of sex and sexuality which Kristeva rejects and which Edelman understands to be the ingrained and inescapable world order. Sedgwick, like Lewis and

like Edelman, acknowledges “no one need be delusional to find evidence of systematic oppression” (“Paranoid Reading”125-26) but is quick to suggest that stepping out of the fear “does not, in itself, entail a denial of the reality or gravity of enmity or oppression” (128). Perhaps the most critical aspect of this departure from paranoia for queer theorists whose sexuality demands an investment in the discourse is that of mercy for oneself. Instead, I would borrow one of Shannon Winnubst’s epigraphs to “Free to Be Queer: Queer to be Free,” itself a quote from Butler and a plain assessment of personal truth: “It’s hard to be queer all the time.” (qtd. in 111). The burden of embracing antisociality as the queer condition is not just the end of hope but of meaningful conversation. If Ambrosio was always going to be damned and Heaven was always going to be a fiction to him, or if society is always going to make the homosexual a sinthomosexual, then there was never a battle to win or lose. Because “the unidirectionally future-oriented vigilance of paranoia generates, paradoxically, a complex relation to temporality that burrows both backward and forward” (“Paranoid Reading” 130), Edelman is right to assert the absence of futurity because his perspective has already materialized the stuff of the future in the present. Like Ambrosio, he buys into a narrative—that he will be persecuted (likely) and that there is no place for the queer community (uncertain)—which it is in the interest of antagonistic forces, be they demons or homophobes, to cement. If things are already as bad as they can get and nothing can catch us off-guard, we are only left with dealing with the present. Yet, Lewis and Sedgwick both hope for some good surprises in store.

Instead of offering bitter resignation to the world order, Lewis's dreadful Prioress, a tyrant killed for her cruel, near-fatal treatment of Agnes, may be taken as the emblem of this very oppression and her fate understood as the sympathetic *pre*-enactment of that force's fate once its crimes are understood. Her death by mob justice suggests not only Lewis's opposition to her, but his willingness to anticipate the eventual failure of an institution whose morality obstructs basic human rights. Haggerty remarks on Lewis's fear of "the torrent of passion that could be released when repression was overthrown" ("Horrors of Catholicism" par. 16), but he follows this by suggesting "it is important to remember that Lewis seems to take an explicit interest in the violence and even to celebrate it" ("Horrors of Catholicism" par. 16). In linking this to the mob's vengeance, Haggerty opens up the possibility that the normative and the "other" might be unified in mutual resistance to the politics which holds them all in check.

If Edelman's Child symbol is the absolute, fixed state of western culture as it has emerged as he believes, it remains for the queer community to adopt it, to change the narrative from antagonism to investment. With Ambrosio damned and Antonia dead, the pool of characters left to realize such an occasion for queer empowerment dwindles, but Lewis leaves us a final bridge. Theodore, Don Lorenzo's newly acquired page, who is even younger than Antonia and already coming into his apparent homosexuality, offers the first attempt at bridging the divide and overturning the antagonistic politics. If he fails to do so in Lewis's text, neither the character nor the author can be blamed for making

the first effort. But his is the first effort at the reparation that Sedgwick advocates, and his narrative, though sad, posits the possibility of living without paranoia in a phobic society.

A Child Sinthome

Lewis's portrayal of failed morality points more toward a disdain for social and cultural practices than an idea of inherent evil. The villain is a construct, social institutions stifle innate morality, and evil perpetuates itself under the guise of moral authority. He even posits an objectively moral counterpart to Ambrosio through Theodore. Like Lewis, Theodore is a poet (and is used as a proxy for his own writings[10]), and his work contains sexually suggestive elements. Quite unlike Lewis or Ambrosio, Theodore is brought up relatively free and operates with agency for much of the narrative. His worldly experiences provide a necessary bulwark against the corruption he sees, and by the close of the narrative, he retains a relatively happy position as Don Raymond's squire. Yet, his happiness is conditional and hinges on him carefully suppressing his poetry (and thereby his sexuality) from the public.

Theodore's complexity largely owes to his similarities to other characters in the novel. His sexuality makes him comparable to Ambrosio, his youth to Antonia, and his entanglement with Don Raymond to Rosario/Matilda. In this last part, especially, Theodore features as a benign double. One may recall Rosario/Matilda's tear-filled pleas and the crafty story of their "sister" and see how Don Raymond is similarly wooed as

[10] Lewis's The Monk is notable for its overt criticism of the treatment of writers in his time. While my reading centers primarily on Theodore's relation to Lewis's sexuality, the character is used for Lewis to vent some of his general frustrations about authorship as well.

Ambrosio. That is, Theodore pries the older man with many of the same tactics Rosario/Matilda employs. Don Raymond reflects that Theodore "besought me with tears to take him into my service…and tried to convince me that I should find him of infinite use to me upon the road. I was unwilling to charge myself with a…whom I knew could only be a burthen to me: However, I could not resist the entreaties of this affectionate Youth, who in fact possessed a thousand estimable qualities" (Lewis 196). Both the demon and the boy ingratiate themselves with the initially unwilling men, but Theodore omits any deceitful tactics or cruel pressure like Rosario/Matilda's suicidal threat. In this way, he revises the problematic precedent Rosario/Matilda sets by prioritizing service to Don Raymond (selfless love) over personal gratification (lust).

Lauren Fitzgerald provides the most in-depth, insightful look at the homoeroticism that flavors not only Theodore as a character but also as a proxy for Lewis. Particularly, she looks at Theodore's extremely tongue-in-check embedded poem, "Love and Age," which David Lorne Macdonald deems "frankly homoerotic" (90. Romantic love, personified here as Cupid, rebuts Anacreon's callous dismissal, arguing, "Then You could call me—'Gentle Boy!/My only bliss! my source of joy!'—/Then You could prize me dearer than your soul!/Could kiss, and dance me on your knees;/And swear, not wine itself would please,/Had not the lip of Love first touched the flowing bowl!" (Lewis 298-99). The image of Anacreon, now "morose and old" (297) bouncing Cupid on his knee and calling him "Gentle Boy" emphasizes the age disparity even then and reinforces the pederastic quality of the poem. Moreover, Theodore's use of it draws

attention to his own sexual awareness despite his having “scarcely turned of thirteen” (196) and potentially complicates his relationship with Don Raymond.

The next stanza draws attention to the risks Theodore faces in being open with his sexuality and recalls an earlier narrative in *The Monk*. The next part reads, “Must those sweet days return no more?/Must I for aye your loss deplore,/Banished your heart, and from your favour driven?/Ah! no; My fears that smile denies;/That heaving breast, those sparkling eyes/Declare me ever dear and all my faults forgiven” (Lewis 299). Here, the youthful Cupid fears both his physical displacement from the one he desires and the emotional rejection of his love. Here, though, if understood as reflecting Theodore’s own fears, it proves him to be a reliable companion where Rosario/Matilda was merely cunning. He is neither dismissed from Don Raymond’s side, nor does he overstep the bounds of their relationship. Where Ambrosio’s affection for Rosario/Matilda proved sinful and destructive, Theodore’s narrative revises the failing and credits Don Raymond for staying with him by rewarding all of them with a happy ending. The final line of Theodore’s poem reflects hopefully that “Youth and Spring shall here once more their revels keep” (299), though it is unlikely he will find a partner in Don Raymond.

Fitzgerald draws attention to the overtly physical imagery used to describe Anacreon’s relationship with (male presenting) love. Moreover, she draws upon Macdonald’s assertion that Anacreon’s poetry was popular “‘with gay and bisexual poets of the nineteenth century’” to compound the homoeroticism of the scene (par. 11). But it is the poem, Don Raymond, and Theodore’s comments on blame that provide the most

striking commentary on the issues faced by engaging the public. Fitzgerald looks to Don Raymond's warning to Theodore for its "pedagogical function…to teach Theodore about the dangers of the profession…specifically addresses the perils that a writer of a homoerotic text will undergo, reminding Theodore of his '*blackmailability*,'" (par. 15). At the same time, she draws out that his enemies can "maliciously rake out from obscurity every little circumstance which may throw ridicule upon his private character or conduct" (qtd. in Fitzgerald par. 15). And, with the caveat that Sedgewick and other scholars lack the malevolent bent, this is exactly what we have done with Lewis. The mere suspicion of his homosexuality has led to the utmost scrutiny of his work to confirm him as such. Regardless of the reason, Don Raymond's warning is proven justified, and we return again to the paranoia which colors Ambrosio and Edelman's experiences.

In this situation, as with Lewis, it is not necessary that Theodore be homosexual for him to take part in or reject queer negativity. The sexual context of his writing, coupled with the fear of persecution, is more than sufficient to queer his part of the narrative. Fitzgerald emphasizes Don Raymond's comparison of his love for Agnes (which is itself sexually transgressive) and the "mania" of authorship, highlighting how Lewis draws attention to the inevitability of self-expression. In defiance of the pressure to mask, suppress, or deny this part of their identity, Fitzgerald quotes Don Raymond, "Authorship is mania, to conquer which no reasons are sufficiently strong; and you might as easily persuade me not to love, as I persuade you not to write" (qtd. in 16). The sexual connotation of the authorship, including the homosocial interaction Fitzgerald

emphasizes between authors working off their predecessors, primes Theodore to participate in the homophobic cultural politics by a) forcing his censorship/repression and b)affording him the opportunity to covertly act on his affection. Certainly, Theodore, who has served only as a loyal page to Don Raymond and is himself a youth, has done nothing to warrant the very real danger of discovery. What is there to discover but some writing and a friendship? If any point in the novel strains Sedgwick's ideas of escaping paranoia, it is not Ambrosio with his apparent laundry list of crimes to check off but innocent Theodore who may as easily fall victim to the same persecution. None the less, Theodore's ultimate happiness is every bit as problematic as Ambrosio's downfall even by the standards of Jose Esteban Muñoz's "educated hope" (3), itself by far the most cheerful exploration of queer theory.

Theodore, framed as he is in a time of near-complete helplessness for the queer community, is an emblem of tolerance rather than acceptance and the basis for theories of queer futurity like that of Muñoz. Theodore does live and does have friends, but his is a qualified happiness and secondary to that of Don Raymond and Agnes. The persistent oppression which Edelman anticipates and Ambrosio acts out is checked only by one's willingness to accept queer identity's continued deferral that defines Muñoz's supposition that queerness is not yet here. His opening lines, "we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness" (Muñoz 1), challenges the legitimacy of Edelman's queer non-identity by offering instead that it is simply something we are waiting to come into. More so than Sedgwick, Muñoz aligns himself with Edelman's train of thought, alongside theorists like

Tim Dean and Jack Halberstam who similarly discuss child-culture, gay marriage, and queer resistance. It is precisely because Muñoz's sentiments align so closely to Edelman's own that the differing tone of his theory with its emphasis on hope and futurity is vital. Theodore is the sad but hopeful glimmer of an unrealized social shift still in the works more than two hundred years later, and Muñoz's conception of the queer horizon does as much to challenge what he deems wrongly-complacent, queer homonormativity as it does to inspire energetic, forward motion.

Lewis gives only one brief mention of Theodore at the close of *The Monk*, and readers may infer as much from what is unsaid as from the little given. With Don Raymond and Agnes again happily reunited, Lewis tells us that "It is needless to say that Theodore was of the party, and would be impossible to describe his joy at his Master's marriage" (Lewis 627). It is unfair, perhaps, to harp overly much that the young man's happiness is predicated solely on that of his "Master's," and there is something to be said for him being happily integrated into their family dynamic. With Antonia dead along with Agnes's child and no mention of new births, Theodore is the last Child symbol of the narrative and the only one to survive. Yet, while he has found a companion "partial" to both him and his writing, his social circle is notably small. Muñoz would deem this yet another return to the dangerous pursuit of "being ordinary" (21) and adopting normalized ideology. Fitzgerald argues Don Raymond "recommends that he not closet but limit [his work] to a small coterie audience" when he performs (par. 22), thus allowing him a safe, if closely guarded, openness with his society. Compared to "years…happy as can be

those allotted to Mortals" (Lewis 629), Theodore's happy ending seems only incrementally better than Ambrosio's hopeless fate, but I can hardly foresee a happier for Theodore in medieval Spain.

The image of the friendly gay just happy to be tossed table scraps leaves much to be desired. Unfortunately, this is the best Lewis can offer at the time, and his hope for even this may have declined within a few years. Fitzgerald turns to *The Castle Spectre* (1798) for further insight on Lewis's queer tradition but finds only that "one would be hard pressed to find in the drama the kind of utopianism seen in the relationship of Cupid and Anacreon or even Theodore and Raymond" as "Nearly all of the drama's homosocial pair bonds are informed by violence" (Fitzgerald par. 36). This may owe either to the fear of homosocial association among his later characters or to his own mounting frustration that the former is so great a concern. On the one hand, Lewis has positively asserted the merit of hope, that there is a possibility of mercy or forgiveness or, as in Theodores's case, acceptance. Yet, within Lewis's social climate, anything better than the "keep quiet and we might not stone you" treatment Theodore is given is too much to hope for. Instead, Lewis rests all hope in the narrative on a belief that society has no power to define the individual. Ambrosio was still entitled to salvation until he was tricked out of it, Theodore is clearly morally upright despite the censure of his writing/homosexuality, and despite sleeping with Don Raymond out of wedlock, Agnes is treated to all the happiness she could want by the end of the narrative. The latter alone succeeded in permanently escaping the threat of persecution when her aggressors die. For Ambrosio

and Theodore who can never fully escape the threat of judgment, they must hold out against cunning spirits and social persecution if they are to escape the villain/sinthomosexual brand.

To consider the political shift which Theodore is unequipped to signal even as he, as Lewis's instrument, blindly gropes toward it, I turn to Muñoz's critique of contemporary politics. He rejects queer assimilation of the same cultural institutions traditionally used to exclude the queer community. He applies this to what he dubs the "anemic, short-sighted, and retrograde politics" of gay marriage not only on the grounds that few people are in a position to make use of the rights it is supposed to provide but also for returning to the status-quo (Muñoz 20-21). Edelman extends this even to practices like child-rearing, and Muñoz agrees at least up to the extent of seconding his "disdain for the culture of the child" (22). Queer theory's dissatisfaction with the moment is for Muñoz, as with Lewis, an opportunity to look toward the future rather than embrace the present.

From his place in eighteenth-century England, Lewis solidifies his hope of future happiness through the symbol of God. The promise of salvation and some future happiness is realized only through making concrete the notions of the soul and Heaven in *The Monk* even as they are ripped away from Ambrosio, and this narrative distance stands in compliment to the very distance of Muñoz's conception of queerness. If there is a devil, an all-directing death drive as Edelman posits, governing the impulses of the disenfranchised, then perhaps the queer conception of God, far from theological, is the

distant, accommodating future Edelman rejects as impossible. For Ambrosio, *if* there is a Heaven with hands outstretched to receive him and he really *could* go to this Heaven and claim this future so seemingly impossible that within the narrative, it still must seem as distant as an *actual* Heaven. The internal imperative of the death drive devil and the external pressure the church's sexual policies foreclose this option and even his active attempt to participate in his only socially prescribed role, monasticism, the irony being that institutionalized religion is the chief barrier of his faith. In this way, Lewis's use of faith prefigures Edelman's idea of futurism and supposes only that his current world is unsuitable to realizing this moral correction. Lewis's depiction of the theological framework does not exempt Ambrosio from salvation even in adulthood—instead emphasizing his child-ness by his social and sexual inexperience—until he actively rejects it. In this more inclusive rendering, this theological "child of God" rather than Child of politics, anyone can actually take up the mantle of the child and command the compassion it invokes. Lewis ultimately posits a more inclusive Child symbol, encompassing everyone rather than a phantasmal, symbolic child, whose future is only realized (or averted) through death.

Reversely, Edelman expects the violence he can so easily point out in history, in literature, and in policy because in each category he finds evidence for it, but he mistakes it for the totality of the queer experience. As Sedgwick reasons, "Learning that 'just because you're paranoid doesn't mean you don't have enemies,' somebody might deduce that being paranoid is not an effective way to get rid of these enemies'…this person

might instead be moved to reflect, 'but then, just because you have enemies doesn't mean you have to be paranoid" (127). In this, she strikes upon the critical difference in approaches like Edelman's and Muñoz's. In the latter's, the same general social views as the former are adopted for a hopeful investment if a future still far off.

Thus, Muñoz offers anti-antiutopianism not as a means for dismissing queer negativity but as a counterforce against a critical approach that can "too easily snap into the basically reactionary posture of denouncing a critical imagination that is not locked down by a short-sighted denial of anything but the here and now" (14). There is something profoundly circuitous, even self-defeating, in the "shadow of a Child whose freedom to develop undisturbed by encounters, or even by the threat of potential encounters, with an "otherness" of which its parents, its church, or the state do not approve…terroristically holds us all in check" (Edelman 21), but, in drawing attention to the strain such a construct puts on individuals, much of its power may be word down. Indeed, such a symbol, though brandished frequently and to great effect, reflects only the attempt of a political force to mask its control and create undue antagonism. Regardless of the tension between groups and factions, Muñoz's future enacting mode prepares to resist paranoia and reactionary mistakes. The desire to control the mode and tone of the queer conversation represents a key turn in queer relations to one another and to the world around them. At the close of his introduction, Muñoz calls for a "renewed and newly animated sense of the social" (18), one which shrugs off the hopelessness of those brands of queer theory that insist on reducing the discourse to its most negative state. In

place of Edelman implicitly destructive mode, Muñoz urges a conversational shift toward how to improve the situation or, at the very least, make the most of the circumstances.

The issue of the Child symbol resolves itself to be nothing more than smoke and mirrors. Its invocation pits those in its likeness unwillingly against the sinthomosexual who has been instructed to see it as the true oppressive force. Thus, Lewis's narrative closes with the death of Child symbol Antonia and sinthomosexual Ambrosio, with their society a little worse for wear but still standing. In this way, Lewis anticipates not the fixed future but the looming political scheme that will exploit sexual differences for social control. Edelman's theory of sinthomosexuals does exactly what it sets out to: it defines the social dislocation of the queer community and the negativity such a position carries. However, his paranoid reading affirms only the past political tactic, and, looking forward, we may see how a no less dangerous political shift actively weaponizes sexuality again, this time intent on imposing the queer presence with the same fear tactics that once repressed it.

* * *

Lewis's novel certainly does not manage to elide its own homophobia as the novel navigates these then new, dark water. It cannot be held up today as a celebration of the queer self or even an *open* admission of queerness. Instead, it is the echo of an increasingly archaic mode of thinking, one wherein the queers are villains, are sinthomosexuals, are apart from their world. Where Lewis could hardly brush against

homosexuality in his time without fear of retribution, the twenty-first century sees the queer community armed with loud voices, bright flags, and sheer mass.

What Lewis is seemingly all too conscious of and what Edelman theory perhaps unconsciously endorses is fear. There is a reasonable and time-honored fear of the world, of family, of the God in whose name the queer community is frequently murdered, and of the self at the heart of queer politics. Queer theory argues from outside the comfort of the accepted and acceptable to suggest that, perhaps, the fags and dykes and trannies are *actually* people. In the process of defending the seemingly audacious idea that these people might want to be treated as such, the queer community can come across as overzealous. We are at a point where external criticism is necessarily looked at with suspicion, even rage, for the presumption that someone outside would consider delineating identity or acceptable behavior.

We meet the limit of the antisocial queer theory precisely at the moment we would practice it. Its merit is understood only in acknowledging it is the "other's" other, our final recourse when all else bottoms out. Shapeless and without definition, the queer community can no more build on it than on heteronormativity, on closeting, on the disavowal of their own identity. What Edelman puts before readers is a premise that recalls the sinthome—that unpleasant stitch where reason and reality fail to properly mesh—and cautions the queer community away from complacency. The battle is not won, neither against social or political constructs, and there is nothing in the past that the queer community may wrest for itself. In dwelling on long centuries of repression and

terrorism, we risk perpetuating the nihilism imposed on past generations and allowing ourselves to be subject to definition by external forces.

CONCLUSION

The Monk's popularity in its time and longevity over these last centuries is proof of the public taste for spectacle, scandal, and lurid details which social conventions render taboo. In cordoning off areas of discussion from polite conversation, the culture produces an abjected space which, now cut off from social consciousness, becomes rife with the unknown and the fear it breeds. In this space, Gothic trappings of demons and magic latch onto real-life issues, color them grotesque, and flash them at the public. The queer becomes a literal skeleton in the closet, laughing obscenely as spectators worry over the uncertain threat it poses.

Much of this fear, for both sides, stems from the persistent uncertainty of where the other stands and what they want. For Lewis, the possibility of coming across as anything other than a picture-perfect example of heteronormativity carries the threat of trial and execution, and hope rests only in faith of an unseen, unknowable good after death. For Edelman, two hundred more years of defining homosexuality, bringing it into the open, and trying to banish the idea of the "gay threat" has failed to erase the social division. He opts for abandoning the goal entirely. Their similar concerns (the impossibility of a queer present) and diverging beliefs (no future versus a distant future) boil down to a concern for the legitimacy of the villain/sinthomosexual. The question becomes whether the division of the homosexual from heteronormative culture an innate incompatibility or an unfortunate construct. The shifts in the social climate from 1796 to

2004 to 2020, including the shift from executing homosexuals to allowing them to marry and have kids (regardless of whether the queer community desires it), calls into question whether the queers will always be queer. Old prejudices seem unlikely to die out entirely, but, as the tide shifts, the role of homosexuals and others under the queer banner as outliers becomes increasingly uncertain.

Edelman reminds his audience in *No Future* of the history of violence surrounding homosexuality. He offers several accounts of contemporary, homophobic violence, including the murder of Matthew Shepard in 1998 when two straight men brutalized and left him for dead outside a bar. Flash forward eighteen years (twelve years after the book's publication) to the mass shooting at the gay club, Pulse, that rocked America and left forty-nine people dead, and it is clear that Edelman's fears in 2004 hold merit even today. Yet, Edelman's wholesale embrace of negativity grounds itself in the absolute certainty that the queer community cannot be embraced by society now or in the future. Nearly two decades after *No Future*'s release, the social climate, with the help of smart technology and social media, has shifted and shifted far. What Lewis could only distantly anticipate and what queer theorists like Jose Esteban Muñoz and Tim Dean push for seems, if not nearer, more tangible than it was in Georgian Era England.

Some theorists have weighed in on likely reasons for recurrent terrorism against queers stretching back as early as Renaissance-era England. Per Jeffery Weeks, the early codification of sexuality "has two effects: it first helps to provide a clear-cut threshold between permissible and impermissible behaviour; and secondly, it helps to segregate

those labelled as ‘deviants’ from others, and thus contains and limits their behaviour pattern” (*Between Men*, qtd. in 85). Whatever social progress the west may claim, anyone in the LGBTQIAP community cannot fail to notice that the same threats and the same violence felt in the 1600s even through the 1900s still looms just overhead. This is evident even on the level of language as an often subtle but no less violent pattern of suppression. Sedgwick extends her concept of the “unspeakable” discussed in “The Self as Other” to the culture itself. She argues “its very namelessness, its secrecy, was a form of social control” (“Toward the Gothic” 94), and it enforced this control with the utmost vehemence. The critic takes as her example a scene from Beverley Nichol’s autobiography, *Father Figure*, wherein the boy’s father catches him reading Dorian Gray and “nearly choked. He hurled the book at his son. He spat on it over and over, frothing at the mouth. Finally he began ripping the book to shreds-with his teeth” (95). This is the negativity poised against the queer which reasserts their alienation regardless of their character and reinforces sinthomosexuality or outright villainy. If such an episode reminds the queer community that their enemies have lost none of their viciousness to time, it is at least checked by recent shifts in paranoid politics that Lewis could little foresee and that Edelman seemingly mistrusts. As of the publication of *No Future* in 2004, Edelman’s stance that prejudice against queers was an impassable hurdle, having resisted erosion for centuries, was generally viable. For instance, it was only in 2015 that same-sex couples won the right to marry and adopt in all fifty states. Yet, the queer

community *did* get these rights, and it has tremendous implications for the possibility of queer acceptance moving forward.

A key step in the transition from villain to person is the shift in the idea of what homosexuality actually is. After decades of discussion, experimentation, and theory, 1973 marked the landmark decision to remove homosexuality from the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Jack Drescher's historical account of the decision notes the movement away from theories of pathology like those put forth by Edmund Bergler and Richard von Krafft-Ebingand theories of immaturity to the much more benign theory of natural variation. Coming out of the political climate left by early theorists, "DSM-I classified 'homosexuality' as a 'sociopathic personality disturbance'" (Drescher 569). In this notion of homosexuality as sexual deviancy is the echo not just of the horrific efforts to "cure" it but also the very sentiments which made Ambrosio and his monastery so dreadful even before his fall. His words to Agnes, "I will render you a more essential service. I will rescue you from perdition in spite of yourself; Penance and mortification shall expiate your offence, and Severity force you back to the paths of holiness" (Lewis 74), are as a prophesy of the "corrections" awaiting the queer community centuries later. Drescher identifies the social impact of moving away from this mentality and away from the stigma of homosexuality as an accepted, treatable mental illness. That is, in stripping away the prejudicial rendering of homosexuality as in inherent flaw or disorder, new avenues opened up for queer acceptance which even now under investigation.

The current moment reflects an attempt to clean out this closet and, moreover, to identify the skeleton in it. Is it human? Does it have a name? Does it bite? 2020 marks a year of radical social upheaval. And this presence, perhaps solely by the force of its weight, has induced a slow, unsteady shift in how the community is treated. As Suzanna Danuta Walters offers in "Queer Freedom and the Tolerance Trap," "It doesn't make sense to say that we tolerate something unless we think that it's wrong in some way." On the surface, this statement is, well, banal. Queer activists for the last decade have called attention to the failure of the message of tolerance because it acknowledges not only a difference, but an error which one passively endures. In so doing, it feeds the resignation to outlier status which antisocial queer theory holds at its heart and settles for the forfeiture both of queer power and social presence. Fortunately, "the triumphalist story…tethered to tolerance as both the means and the end of gay liberation" which Walters condemns is falling out of vogue in favor of a new wave of acceptance and celebration.

With such possibilities looming, Edelman's queer negativity seems a grim choice to make. Even by its very title, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* anticipate a wholehearted surrender to self-destructive tendencies which can only further the disenfranchisement which first engendered its ideas. Are we to confirm Bergler's description of homosexuals as "essentially disagreeable people, regardless of their pleasant or unpleasant outward manner... [their] shell…a mixture of superciliousness, fake aggression, and whimpering. Like all psychic masochists…subservient when

confronted with a stronger person, merciless when in power, unscrupulous about trampling on a weaker person" (qtd. in Drescher 566)? The psychiatric field, governmental bodies, and the media seem content to leave behind such notions. Indeed, even Lewis notion that Ambrosio can be forgiven his sexuality, something which echoes the "mid-20th century homophile (gay) activist groups [who] accepted psychiatry's illness model as an alternative to societal condemnation of homosexuality's 'immorality' and were willing to work with professionals who sought to 'treat' and 'cure' homosexuality" (570), can be set aside in favor of claiming full and acceptable personhood. The sinthomosexual is dying even at the moment of its birth, withering away without outdated conflations of sexuality and morality. With it goes Lewis's devil, the queer's alleged "intrinsic moral evil" (qtd. in Edelman 89), and the hold of villainy over the queer narrative.

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