

THE TRELLIS PAPERS

This is a series of working papers initially derived from a project designed to introduce Second Cycle students to research. TRELLIS is an acronym for “Teaching Research in English-Language Literatures, Intermediate Stage”. The project sought to build links between research carried out at postgraduate and professional level and the kind of research-oriented work that is offered to First Cycle students. It included a series of seven sessions -the TRELLIS Seminars- which ran in the Department of English at the UAM between 2002 and 2006.

The overall goal of these sessions was twofold. On the one hand they aimed at laying down a practical base for research. Eight critical texts from different research areas (history of science, linguistics, postmodernist fiction, fairytale, medieval epic, medieval narrative construction, anthropology, thematics) were studied and commented in depth for their special contribution to literature studies; these all touched broad, mostly interdisciplinary, mostly historical concerns. Attention was paid to argument construction, use of data, and layout. There was also some coaching in library and web searches and use of source materials.

On the other hand, the seminars concentrated on issues at the intersection between canonical literature, popular culture, and folklore. Because this intersection appears to view only when researchers take up a global perspective, when they engage a field theory of text, the three domains under scrutiny have occasionally been referred to as ‘the Field triangle’, and the term may continue in use so long as we remember that it is not meant to be exhaustive and that other areas of interaction will be found to exist in the textual Field.

Among other tasks, and as part of their training, each participant in the TRELLIS Seminars was asked to prepare and deliver a 20-minute paper. Papers dealt with problems of narrative structure, evolution, thematics, and so on in such areas as cartography, videogames, myth, epic, fairytale, ballad, popular music, medieval romance, children’s literature, film, comix, advertising, and thers. It was the result of these talks that the present series was initially designed to publish.

Meanwhile, however, the project goes on and the ‘trellis’ concept has outgrown its original intention and now has the full function suggested by the word: an interlace of efforts which, in bringing together various types of research at different levels of complexity, seeks to reinforce and disseminate results, thus hoping to create a feedback loop throughout the three Cycles. One practical aim is to provide a flexible, reasonably speedy method of publication by editing each paper independently—though the possibility that some of these materials may eventually be collected in book form on thematic or other criteria is not to be ruled out.

The TRELLIS Papers accordingly edits a variety of materials that include not only the results of the TRELLIS Seminar but also work presented by contributors to the Liminality Seminars, as well as other relevant work.

Three points need to be made here. First, the primary objective is to make available to the Department various types of work carried out in it. Second, quality is a must in any paper submitted for inclusion in the series. Third, submissions to *The TRELLIS Papers* will be expected to conform to the editorial policy outlined in the second number of the series. This is not a matter ‘for the editors to sort out’; on the contrary, it is an intrinsic responsibility of researchers to ensure that their work complies with some widely accepted set of conventions. The instructions provided in *TTP 2* are in agreement with international practice.

THE EDITORS

PASSION, REASON AND FREEDOM: THE COMPLEXITY OF THE DISCOURSE OF PASSIONS IN MATTHEW G. LEWIS' *THE MONK*

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INTRODUCTION

“More passionate no creature living”. Such is the description that Matthew G. Lewis gives of himself in the preface to his novel *The Monk: A Romance*. It is a suitable description as well for his protagonist, Ambrosio, but equally for Manfred in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, of whom we are told that “his virtues were always ready to operate, when his passion did not obscure his reason” (Walpole:30). The themes of the battle between passion and reason, the danger of violent impulses and unrepressed desires, among others, seem to point to a recurrent motif in both novels, and very probably in much of Gothic Fiction. In this case we have chosen Lewis' novel as a most fertile ground for its exploration, since it presents to us several characters who fall a prey to their wild passions. Powerful and destructive, bursting in torrents or carrying away the characters to their fatal end, these driving forces look very much like the irresistible current which sweeps away the monk's corpse at the end of the novel. In the present study we will try to describe how they are characterised in the text, and how they shape the metaphorical fall of those characters.

No less deserving of analysis is the significance of the term in relation to *free will*. The *homo rationalis* was endowed with this potentially dangerous virtue, and reason must govern its impulses. Were the passions nothing but the representation of our desires? In releasing them, are we not simply enjoying our liberty to act without restraints? Furthermore, the concept of free will brings into the picture another aspect of the characterization of passions in the novel: do we *submit* irrevocably to passions? Or do they represent a dangerously unrepressed desire, which, as the term *free will* suggests, we have indulged in voluntarily? We will also try to unveil the ambiguity that results from the identification of passions with free will, and the conflicting discourses that destabilize our elucidation of the characters' fall, in offering us clues to two contradictory readings: the characters' surrender to a force external to them, and, alternatively, their voluntary indulgence of their inner wishes. We will finally attempt to account for the implications that these opposing representations can hold for our understanding of the book's criticism of religion.

THE NOVEL'S DISCOURSE OF PASSIONS

Three characters in *The Monk* are driven by passion to suffer a terrible fall: the Domina, Donna Rodolpha, and, most notably, Ambrosio. Their metaphorical descent is one towards the most perverse side of themselves, a moral corruption that will lead them to attempt murder, in the case of the Domina and Donna Rodolpha, and to commit incest, matricide and fratricide in the case of Ambrosio. The fatal outcome awaiting all of them is death. In the case of Ambrosio, not only death in a prolonged agony, but also the damnation of his soul.

The wide range of expressions that refer to this driving force indeed suggests that it should have been repressed: sometimes they are “unbridled” (Lewis: 21), or “ill-regulated” passions (ib.300), which must be resisted, contained by reason, so the characters strive to “command” (ib.379), “restrain”(ib.186) or “subdue” (ib.40) them. And if there is such an urgent necessity to keep them under control, it must be because the contrary entails terrible consequences, due to their violent nature. We find in the text three references to “the violence of passions” (ib.53, 135 and 306), and the majority of adjectives employed to describe them serve to emphasize this quality: passions are “violent” (ib.133 and 257), “vigorous” (ib.21), “strong” (ib.40), “wild[est]” (ib.89), “despotic” (ib.21) and “delirious” (ib.432), which highlights their capacity to control the characters and even drive them to insanity.

The danger that unrestrained passions represent is always implicit in their violence and power¹. However, the text is not short of phrases that express the effects of passion in us. We find in it several verbs and adjectives that denote physical pain: the characters are sometimes “inflamed”, “choaked” or “flaming” with passion (ib.48, 383 and 385, respectively). The intensity of the feeling can even pervade the whole body, offering tableaux like the one which Agnes witnesses: “I shall never forget what a passion [Cunegonda] was in” (ib.141). On some occasions, the effects can be perceived both in mind and body, as the expression “rave(d) with passion” (ib.294 and 432) suggests, by assimilating passion to a fever, a malady that affected the body, but which was also increasingly considered at the time as a symptom of a mental condition². Finally, not only physical pain but even death can be the outcome of giving free rein to passions, as is the case for Donna Rodolpha, who “in an excess of passion [...] broke a

¹ This is a characteristic present in all the instances of passion in the text, regardless of the different shades of meaning that the word adopts throughout the novel, oscillating between a driving force that moves us to follow the impulse of our desires, and an overpowering feeling, product of an extreme sensibility. We consider that the intense debate on the subject of emotion in the 18th and 19th century, which dealt with topics like the relationship between mind and body, the effects of extreme sensibility, or the contention between passion and reason, results in a certain fluidity of meaning in the names and definitions of words of emotion. It seems to us that this instability of meaning transpires also into literature. The passions in *The Monk*, however, can be identified in the majority of the cases with an impulse, a desire that forces us to disregard reason, thus adopting the first meaning quite consistently.

² For a detailed discussion of the shifting perception and incipient psychologizing of afflictions of the mind in the 18th century, see Porter, R. *Flesh in the Age of Reason*. London: Penguin Books, 2004, chapter 18 “Unreason”, pp. 305-319.

blood-vessel and expired in the course of a few hours” (ib.193). As we have pointed out above, several characters in the novel die as a consequence of unrestrained passion, but in the case of Donna Rodolpha we could even argue that she was literally killed by them. The implication, therefore, is that passions threaten both our physical integrity and the salvation of our soul, by moving us to sin. The indulgence of our vices and appetites reveals a lack of fortitude against temptation, since strength (moral strength in this case) is needed against violence. The language to describe this struggle is also tinged with physicality: the characters “combat” (ib.89) or “contend with” passions (ib.68). But what is the hope of prevailing upon their “irresistible strength” (ib.130)? It is no wonder that on many occasions the characters must “abandon” themselves to passions (ib.234, 287), “yield” (ib.49, 382) and be “subjected” to them (ib.300). One single submission to their force can result in such disgraces as those suffered by Agnes and Raymond, who enjoy their love in the convent garden when “in an unguarded moment, the honour of Agnes was sacrificed to [Raymond’s] passion” (ib.186). This unique yielding to their desires marks the departure point for their ordeal. Their case, however, is somewhat different to those of the characters that finally die as a consequence of their weakness: first, Agnes atones for her crime withstanding torture and witnessing the death of her baby; second, it is clearly stated in the text that the lovers only surrendered to passion once, showing afterwards deep regret, a circumstance that is absent from the fall of the Domina, Donna Rodolpha and Ambrosio: as we will argue later, their descent is marked by a regular submission to passions (particularly Ambrosio’s).

Thus, this semantic field represents passions as a force of tremendous power which must be fought against by the individual. The character and the passion become contending factions, and despite the characterization of passions as inner feelings, inherent to the individual—suggested by adjectives like “slumbering” (ib.66), “dormant” (ib.210, 239) and “sleeping” (ib.259) passions, that is, hidden inside us, waiting for an opportunity to be awakened—or their identification with Nature as opposed to Education (ib.238), the connotations of the expressions that we have enumerated reveal a tendency to detach the passions from the individual, to display the characters at odds with their impulses. However, there is a hint to different undertones to this discourse: sometimes there is no battle against passions, but the characters “indulge” in them (ib.225, 236); they give free rein to their impulses and “give loose” to passions devised to be “enjoy[ed] unrestrained” (ib.428). The notion of the free passion is already suggested in the adjective “unbridled” (also applied in the novel to “desires” (ib.380), “lust” (ib.386), and “debauchery” (ib.173)), and in actions such as “restrain” and “subdue”. All these words carry the implication that passions must be free to act and control the subject, but there is another, crucial connotation in expressions like “giv[ing] loose”: the consent of the individual, the capacity of choice that makes of “giv[ing]” or “indulg[ing]” an act of free will. This alternative discourse, that involves the individual’s will as a decisive condition to the submission to passions, makes of the characters’ fall a much more complex issue. In the following sections we will try to unveil the significance that freedom and free will hold for our analysis.

FREEING THE BODY, ENSLAVING THE SOUL

In the preceding section we have pointed to three characters as the protagonists of a metaphorical fall provoked by a submission to passion. The Domina, the Baroness Donna Rodolpha and Ambrosio challenge the prevalence of reason in an age where the human being was believed to be placed above beasts thanks to reasoning, and where Passion was declared the enemy of health, sanity and virtue. Ambrosio first tries to drive Matilda out of the monastery by warning her: “[i]nsensibly your passions will gain a superiority over your reason; and far from these being repressed by my presence, every moment which we pass together, will only serve to irritate and excite them” (ib.64). The preponderance of passions constitutes an alteration of the established hierarchy, so that the deaths of the Domina, the Baroness and Ambrosio represent the regulation of the system and the return to order. The course of Ambrosio, however, conveys a much more complex picture of the contention between passion and reason, unveiling relationships between body and soul, Education and Nature, and freedom and slavery, among others, which we will attempt to analyse, and whose significance we will try to explain.

The first of the characters in displaying a violent rule of passion in her actions is the Domina of the order of St.Clare, who reacts to Agnes’ fault with extreme rigour. In reading Agnes’ letter, “The Domina’s countenance grew inflamed with passion” (ib.48), a sentiment that springs from her pride, severely hurt when she discovered the laws of her order broken and the fact “made known to Ambrosio, to the idol of Madrid, to the man whom she was most anxious to impress with the opinion of the strictness and regularity of her house!” (ib.48). Her arguments to torture Agnes granted her the support of the majority of the nuns, although these were “contradicted by reason and charity”(ib.414). The excess, the extreme hardness that her passion dictated to her were totally opposed to the moderation that reason proclaimed as virtue, and the severity of her measures, when publicly revealed, provokes a riot and the citizens of Madrid, unable to wait for the Inquisition’s trial, stone her to death. She ironically dies abused by people who, like her, do not believe in mitigations, and who grow “inflamed by passion” to inflict upon her the severest punishment.

Donna Rodolpha is, like the Domina, a secondary character that joins in the parade of passion-driven figures. Domineered by her adulterous love for Raymond, which we see to grow uncontrollably and make her burst in fits of jealousy and envy, she is furthermore spurred on by her “wounded pride” and commands that he be murdered. No agent is needed in this case to reverse the rule of passion, since passion itself will lead her to her end: the feelings that moved her were too intense for her to resist the coup, and “in an excess of passion, she broke a blood-vessel and expired in the course of a few hours” (ib.193). She serves as another example of the perils of unrestrained, extreme feeling, and with the atonement for her submission to passion she contributes to the ideal of a world governed by reason.

The epitome of the passion-driven character in the novel is Ambrosio. The language of passions is most profuse in the description of his progression into the depths of immorality. Of all the images with which the passions are related in the semantic field that we have sketched above, the most illustrative of all could be the liberated passion. Since passions are supposed to be governed by reason, the problem that affects these characters is, most of all, the “unrestrained passion”: the passion that is not contained

within the bounds of the fortress of reason will exert its influence over us. In being characterised as “violent” and “strong” passions, the power of reason lies very much in the quality of *fortitude*. As the story of Ambrosio will show, the man of reason is revealed as such in his battle with passions: no merit is afforded to him who restrains “sleeping passions”, since nothing is there to be restrained. The knowledge of, or—even better—the exposure to, the driving force of passion (to temptation in the religious reading of the novel) is therefore essential to prove the strength of our reason. As we have pointed out above, the story of Ambrosio amply reflects this fact.

Ambrosio, as a secluded monk, lives deprived of physical and moral freedom. A parallelism between Ambrosio’s freedom and the freedom of his passions is instantly drawn as a consequence of this circumstance: restrained within the physical confines of the monastery and the moral confines of his vows, Ambrosio has never been able to experience the force of passions. Moreover, he does not contemplate the possibility of being himself governed by passions, and so he believes himself invulnerable to human faults, confident of a victory upon temptations which he has never experienced, and of whose power he is unaware. His ignorance, which is precisely due to a seclusion that is meant to protect him, will therefore make of him an easy prey to seduction; and an opposition between his innate and acquired feelings will be evoked, already marking Ambrosio as an inherently passionate character:

[T]he different sentiments with which Education and Nature had inspired him were combating in his bosom: it remained for his passions, which as yet no opportunity had called into play, to decide the victory [...]. His monastic seclusion had till now been in his favour, since it gave him no room for discovering his bad qualities (ib.238)

The education of Ambrosio seems indeed at a disadvantage with his nature, the more instinctual drives that passions represent. However, what he lacks is not knowledge of the existence of passion, given his theological education. What he lacks is the moral strictness that should have regulated one of the most powerful passions: vanity. The 18th century saw the development of a new trend in education, greatly inspired by the ideas expounded by Locke in his *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693). If, for the hardening of the body, the roughness of “natural” life to the detriment of the commodities of urban life was hailed as the best prevention, for the hardening of the mind a disciplined moral education was needed. A perfect summary of the importance of this kind of discipline was laid out in Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: With Reflections on Female Conduct in the More Important Duties of Life* (1787), where she clearly stated which were the weak points to which the educational effort should be directed:

Reason should cultivate and govern those instincts which are implanted in us to render the path of duty pleasant—for if they are not governed they will run wild; and strengthen the passions which are ever endeavouring to obtain dominion—I mean *vanity and self-love*.³

The dangers that a defective education represents concerning soundness of mind and moral principles are made self-evident in *The Monk*. Two characters, Ambrosio and Antonia, are the most ignorant of the world and flesh in the novel, since both are kept away from knowledge—Ambrosio by his monastic life, Antonia by her mother’s

³ Wollstonecraft, Mary, 1787, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: With Reflections on Female Conduct in the More Important Duties of Life*, quoted in Porter, p. 266.

overprotection. This will lead Ambrosio to a complete moral corruption, as a man unable to control his passions. Antonia, for her part, will be a victim of Ambrosio's obsession. Either actively or passively, both characters suffer the consequences of ignorance. They must necessarily be liberated to discover what they must confront, for as long as they remain ignorant they will lack the resources to defend themselves. Antonia, by straying from her mother's protection, will experience "the perfidy of the world" (Lewis:21), a perfidy she claims to know through her mother's story. In the case of Ambrosio, the liberation of his passions goes along with the liberation of his body. Motivated by his vanity, lust and pride, which are perfectly fed by Matilda, he enjoys carnal pleasures and frees his body from the moral restrictions of his vows and the physical restrictions of the monastery walls. As in the case of Antonia, a discovery is awaiting him: he will be able to glimpse at the fall he may suffer should he fail to repress his passions. This moment, in which his reason prevails upon his impulses, will show him a very different Ambrosio than the one he used to perceive, the man above other human beings. His passions would lead him not even among common mortals, but below them, as corresponds to those deprived of God's forgiveness:

If I yielded to the temptation, I should sacrifice to one moment of guilty pleasure my reputation in this world, my salvation in the next (ib.70)

But this moment of awareness will not be sufficient to prevent the fall, just as the gypsy's and Elvira's advice will not be sufficient for Antonia to keep away from Ambrosio: she will continue believing in his virtue, and "the perfidy of the world" will continue being as strange to her as it was before. Neither will the monk pay much attention to his momentary vision of fatality: he will persist in his conviction that his soul is safe from condemnation, in spite of all the crimes he commits. It is only when their descent is complete, when there is no possibility of ever ascending again, that they notice the full import of the reality they ignored. For Antonia, this moment of recognition takes place in the vault, which she will not quit alive; for Ambrosio, it will come after he has irretrievably given up his soul to the Devil. He even refuses to believe the Devil, and raises his hands to heaven for the last time: Lucifer has to convince him of the futility of this act by making him fall even deeper, this time physically, down a precipice full of pointed rocks that anticipates the eternity of torments awaiting him.

Their moment of awareness also reveals the agent who was arranging every move to effect their ruin. Despite all the efforts that they were making to liberate themselves, they were actually advancing towards the end that was devised for them, thus unveiling a dramatically ironic paradox: the freedom they have chosen to enjoy actually means slavery for them. Sexual slavery for Antonia in the vault, and the perpetual slavery of Ambrosio's soul in hell. This is, in the end, the outcome of the fatal trick played upon two characters who, despite their characterization as victim and villain, are ultimately discovered to be both victims of a plan they were incapable of perceiving.

The disclosure of a plot to enslave the characters brings to light the workings of Fate in their lives. Was the denouement of their stories unavoidable? Here, the language of the novel points to an ambivalence that seems impossible to resolve. Antonia insists, on her arrival in Madrid, on having her future predicted by a gypsy. The woman predicts that "destruction o'er you hovers; / Lustful man and crafty Devil / Will combine to work your evil; / And from earth by sorrows driven, / Soon your soul must speed to heaven." (ib.38). It appears from these words that Antonia's destiny is already determined, but the

following piece of advice contradicts this notion. The gypsy advises her to guard herself against “One more virtuous [...] / Than belongs to Man to be, / One, whose self no crimes assailing, / Pities not his Neighbour’s Failing” (ib.38), in order to “delay” the fatal end. Therefore, in avoiding the monk’s company she still holds a chance to modify her destiny. Similarly, Ambrosio is presented as a victim of the Devil’s plots, aided by his passionate disposition: he was endowed with passions that had already “marked [him] for [the Devil’s] prey” (ib.440), as is anticipated at the beginning of the novel when Lorenzo tells Antonia that

[h]e is just at that period of life when the passions are most vigorous, unbridled, and despotic; his established reputation will mark him out to seduction as an illustrious victim; novelty will give additional charms to the allurements of pleasure; and even the talents with which Nature has endowed him will contribute to his ruin (ib.21).

These characters’ destinies, however, present an unconclusive contradiction if we assume their inescapability. Does the fact that the Devil marks the monk as his prey make of him one of the hopeless damned? Not if we consider Lorenzo’s words. The cavalier, after his account of Ambrosio’s difficulties to overcome seduction, recognizes that he has no doubt as to the monk’s victory upon temptation. His salvation is therefore a difficult task, but not impossible. Equally, the gypsy’s and Elvira’s advice stress the role of Antonia’s sense to shun Ambrosio, and numerous references point to the girl’s “ignorance” (ib.264), “innocence” (ib.262) or “extreme simplicity” (ib.257) as a feature that prevented her from noticing danger, and at her (false) deathbed she “acknowledge[d] without restraint, that to relinquish [Ambrosio’s] society was very painful to [her]: But such was the will of a Parent, and [she] dared not disobey” (ib.341). Hers still seems to be, for all the inexorable character that in it we may perceive, a story full of wrong choices, a life misguided by her ignorance. In the case of Ambrosio, the interpretation that favours an ill-fated life marked by his passions cancels the presence of anything such as free will in the novel, since the possibility of choice that temptation implies (in the choice of either resisting or yielding to it) disappears in favour of a cruel irony: if the monk’s fate was no other than to yield to his passions and surrender to temptation, all the trials of seduction that he did not withstand, all his attempts to discern the possibility of salvation, even his final tormenting doubts concerning his damnation, only served to stir in him the pangs of conscience and a useless sense of guilt.

The interpretation of Antonia and Ambrosio’s destinies remains for us unclear. As we have observed, we find instances in the text that move us to read the characters’ stories both as a consequence of fate and of their own choices. It would be interesting, however, to further the analysis of Fate in the novel, to include aspects such as the implications that the notion of predestination in a Catholic setting could disclose for our understanding of the text. We will not tackle these topics, for it goes beyond the scope of this essay to do so; nevertheless, the relevance that they may have for an exhaustive study of the characters’ fall must be acknowledged. For the time being, we will develop in the next section the analysis of the growingly contrasting discourses of passions and free will in the text, since, as we have hinted at above in our study of Ambrosio’s fall, the significance of his submission to temptation is closely related to the extent of his liberty to act.

WALKING OR BEING DRIVEN: THE CONFLICT BETWEEN PASSION AND WILL

We have seen in the previous section that the unveiling of a secret plot to condemn Ambrosio could be viewed as the ultimate cause for all the calamities in the novel that arise, in one way or another, from Ambrosio's crimes. But the Devil's revelation stands in opposition to the language that presents Ambrosio and Antonia as characters that strive to escape from the restrictions imposed on them. The Devil avails himself of Ambrosio's inherent passions, by observing "the movements of [his] heart" (he mentions "pride" and "inhumanity" as his vices (ib.440)), and the semantic field that we have examined above showed us a tendency of the language to portray passions as an unopposable force, externalised from the subject, against which there is no possible resistance. Language brings to light two conflicting discourses that oppose Ambrosio's will as the cause of his corruption against his inevitable submission to external forces, which renders free will ineffectual. In this section we will further analyse these two contradictory representations of the cause of the characters' destruction, and their significance for our setting of the religious and cultural frames in which the novel is inscribed.

We have pointed out that the characters' imprisonment, whether physical or not, moves them to obtain their freedom, and the tragical irony of their story is that the slavery they suffer stems from the freedom they have *chosen* to enjoy. Antonia has the chance to shun Ambrosio but she prefers to trust the first impression that the Abbot made in her mind rather than her mother's admonitions. Ambrosio, for his part, is confronted with countless choices, and the narrative is fraught with moments of contention between "the warmth of his constitution" (ib.238) and his fear of condemnation. The arguments that Matilda employs at the Inquisition's dungeon to make him despair of God's pardon, and especially the Devil's insistence upon his signing the parchment, confirm that Ambrosio still had an opportunity to prevent his fall, and only through an act of free will could his soul be lost. The Devil himself discloses this when he is attempting to obtain Ambrosio's soul:

'Take it!' Said the God-abandoned; 'Now then save me! Snatch me from hence!'
'Hold! Do you *freely* and absolutely renounce your Creator and his son?' (ib.437, our emphasis)

But Ambrosio's condemnation is not simply due to this isolated act of free will. As we have mentioned before, the course of his life is full of choices, and therefore his destruction cannot be detached from his steady submission to his passions. Unlike Satan's fall, which was provoked by a single yielding to his pride, Ambrosio's hubris only marks the starting point for a gradual descent that culminates in the irremediable damnation of his soul. Moreover, scenes like the one we have quoted before show Ambrosio at moments of extreme excitement of his passions: driven by his overpowering lust when he first breaks his vows, he perceives "nothing but the pleasure and opportunity" (ib.90); he accepts to conjure up the spirits after he has been conveniently aroused by the images of Antonia in the constellated mirror; he kills Elvira and then Antonia "without allowing himself a moment's reflection" (ib.391) when he

finds himself on the brink of losing his reputation; finally, the Devil urges him to resign his soul just a few seconds before the inquisitors enter his cell to, as he surmises, conduct him to a painful death. It is at such moments of extreme fear that Ambrosio lets his passions conquer his reason, acting impulsively, since he does not allow himself any time to reason and reflect. Ambrosio's will, his faculty to act, is here contrasted with terms like "reason" and "reflection", following a tendency originated in the Renaissance, which increasingly characterized will as the spring of evil doings, and which emphasized that action must be restrained in favour of a reflective procrastination⁴. Ambrosio's incapacity to rely on his reason marks him as an impaired character, deprived of a basic human faculty; moreover, we find again that, beside the interpretation of his condemnation as the aftermath of a devilish influence, there stands the hint of Ambrosio's voluntary relinquishing to evil⁵. The Devil, it would seem, was not taking advantage of an innate inclination to evil, but of the excitement of a passionate disposition that resulted in maimed reasoning. In the case of Manfred passion was a screen that "obscure[d] his Reason" (Walpole:30); similarly, Ambrosio is blinded by passion. The Devil claims to have "observed [Ambrosio's] *blind* idolatry of the Madonna", and remembers that the monk "ran *blindly* into the snare" (Lewis:440, our emphasis). He is even blind enough not to perceive his blindness: "I doat upon Antonia, but am not so blinded by lust as to sacrifice for her enjoyment my existence both in this world and the next." (ib.268) And, again, we observe a sign of Ambrosio's voluntary surrender to pleasure. In repeatedly visiting Antonia, he is said to be "*wilfully* blind to the danger of exposing himself to Antonia's charms" (ib.256, our emphasis). After the Devil's revelation, intended to open his eyes to truth, he also loses his physical sight: the eagles tear out his eyes, leaving him "[b]lind, maimed, helpless, and despairing" (ib.442), only to open them up again to gaze at the torments of hell after his death. Blind to the consequences of his acts, Ambrosio gradually gives up his virtue and peace for momentary relapses into bodily pleasure or safety. This is clearest in the final scene of surrender to the Devil, when he actually signs to free his body from pain and public shame in exchange for the eternal slavery of his soul.

This reveals a divergence between the stories of Antonia and Ambrosio. Although they run parallel in many senses, Antonia herself did not submit to her passions, but she let herself be exposed to a dangerous (and, indeed, passionate) influence she had been advised to avoid, while Ambrosio followed the path to his destruction driven by the impulse of his desires. Therefore, the cause of their fall seems to be determined, in the case of Antonia, by an extreme as dangerous as an excess of passion, which is her extreme innocence; in the case of Ambrosio, it seems to be determined by his incapacity to let his reason restrain his violent passions. This seems to hint at the risk of extremes: the avoidance of seduction, of exposure to temptation, leaves us without arms to fight our passions, and even freedom, taken to a certain point, can bring forth slavery.

But to what extent was Ambrosio enjoying his freedom to act and indulge his desires? Can he really be considered a thoroughly evil character? On the one hand, the

⁴ On this point, see Aguirre, M., 1993, "A Literature of Reflection", *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, Vol. xxix, no. 3, pp. 193-202.

⁵ In reading his moments of submission as momentary relapses into "unreason", we have the key to a less moralistic interpretation of his evil: Ambrosio's lustful mania would find its source, as Porter puts it, "not [in] Satan but [in] the *soma*" (Porter : 307). The Devil would thus not take advantage of an inclination to evil, but of a maimed reason that could even be interpreted as a mania.

language of passions suggests that he was *forced* to plunge into crime, but in expressions like “wilfully blind” it is suggested that his will was actually inclined to perform such evil doings as rape and murder, which mark his descent. Considering quotations like the ones from page 256 and from page 437, which we have quoted above, Ambrosio’s choices, his wilfulness to ignore danger, make him fully responsible for the evil acts that lead to his fatal end. We are thus directed to one of the extremes of the representation of Ambrosio’s fall: a descent into ever-growing depravity and cruelty derived from a perverse will, a product exclusively of his own volition. This language represents a reminiscence of medieval Providence, the supreme design of ultimate goodness, which seems consistent with the setting of the novel in medieval-like, 17th-century catholic Europe. No evil deeds are to stem from nature, but only those derived from human will. The eventual source of the monk’s evil doings would spring from a misapplication of his will. He has intentionally altered both the natural order of things and his own nature. According to St. Augustine,

Truth and wisdom no one can lose unwillingly [...] What is called separation from truth and wisdom is a perverse will which loves lower things. *No one wills anything involuntarily.*

(*De Libero Arbitrio II*, xvi, 37, our emphasis)

A perverse will, a deviated nature would then be the cause of Ambrosio’s evil and of his fall: no external cause or influence. But in Lewis’ discourse of passions, this scheme is challenged by the concept of a force that supersedes human reason, a force that we must combat with all our strength to avoid being controlled by it, and to which, however, we may finally yield. Evil enters the world, first as a too tangible temptation in the quite human form of Matilda (albeit an “acquired” form), and then as a corporeal Devil who manipulates the monk’s surrounding reality. By exciting his passions, the Devil makes Ambrosio share in his numinosity so that the monk, by submitting to their “irresistible strength”, engages in a disruption of order.⁶ We have moved to a representation of Ambrosio’s descent into immorality which is at variance with the one we have just described, that is, the depiction of the influence of the Numinous on the hero, of the irruption of an Evil force in his world to which he surrenders, his reality no longer displaying a supreme design of goodness where Evil originated in a perverse human will, but exhibiting the threat of an external enemy. Powerless against impulses that overwhelm him, the notion of the “ruling passion”, which appears recurrently in Gothic Fiction, acquires full significance. The term alludes to an impulse, a desire or an obsession that is most prominent in the characters (usually males), to the point of eventually “ruling” them, thus driving them to unavoidably indulge those passions and renounce reason. Ambrosio’s ruling passions appear at the beginning of the novel, in Lorenzo’s premonitory dream, imprinted on his forehead as a symbolic expression of the influence they exert upon his reason:

His form was gigantic; his complexion was swarthy, his eyes fierce and terrible; his mouth breathed out volumes of fire; and on his forehead was written in legible characters—‘Pride! Lust! Inhumanity!’ (Lewis:28)

Although the concept of the ruling passion was not uncommon in 18th century literature, there were philosophers and intellectuals who opposed fiercely the threat it

⁶ See Aguirre, M., *The Closed Space*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990, Chapter 5: Gothic Horror: The Haunted House, pp. 91-114.

represented for human reason. Samuel Johnson, a staunch defender of the sovereignty of reason above any other virtue, stated in his preface to Pope that

[t]his doctrine is in itself pernicious as well as false: its tendency is to produce the belief of a kind of moral predestination, or overruling principle which cannot be resisted; he that admits it, is prepared to comply with every desire that caprice or opportunity shall excite, and to flatter himself that he submits only to the lawful dominion of Nature, in obeying the resistless authority of his *ruling passion*.⁷

This doctrine is the one with which Ambrosio's free choice of resigning his soul clashes. As we have seen, the presence of two different discourses produces an unresolved tension in our analysis of the characters' fall, an impossibility to define the root of human evil doings: beside the portrayal of characters willing to enjoy certain freedom upon their body and mind, and driven by such will to evil and to permanent slavery, there remains the semantic field of the violent, ruling, dominating passions, and with it, the submission to an urge that, in being depicted as dominating or opposing the character, has been externalised from the self. The struggle between inner and outer impulses is present even *within* the discourse of the ruling passion, since we must not forget that passions are described as inherent to the self: they represent the "Nature" of the character as opposed to his "Education". This evinces a disquieting picture of the self: there is some powerful force that, once awakened, will drive us to our perdition. And although Lewis' novel presents us Ambrosio "combating", "contending with" his passions (thus detaching them from the character, as we have pointed out before, and making of them a separate entity), they actually dwell inside him.

There remains a question regarding the implicit criticism that this confusion of terms, values and conceptions of evil can represent. Does the typical setting in a southern, "uncivilized", superstitious and catholic city account for the conflict between free will and passion that is posed in the language of the novel? The concern with the opposition between passion and reason points to the philosophical and moral framework of Lewis' own time. As we have signalled before, the issue of fate deserves further study, which will require touching on concepts such as predestination (we have seen that Johnson, in his criticism of the ruling passion quoted above, also mentions a "moral predestination"), a concern intrinsically protestant. ...that a change in the tenets of free will was taking place by the 18th century, but the debate on this subject was still unresolved: Moreover, it is claimed by Porter that a change in the tenets of free will was taking place by the 18th century, but the debate on this subject was still unresolved:

The ancient Christian humanist doctrine of free will was under threat, being exposed as mere rhetoric, wilfully ignoring all the circumstances of human life. The new determinism, by contrast, seemed to lack a logic of autonomous action, and Johnson remained to be answered: 'All theory is against the freedom of the will; all experience for it'" (Porter:418)

This tension between "theory" and "experience" in a characterization of free will seems to be echoed by the conflict between passions and will that we have

⁷ Johnson, S., *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the Works of the English Poets*. In Wimsatt, William K. and Brady, Frank (eds.), *Samuel Johnson: Selected Poetry and Prose*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: California University Press, 1977, p.521. The emphasis is Johnson's.

analyzed. The novel lays out a moral frame within which all submission to our overruling desires deserves a punishment, and constructs a gigantic plot whereby the characters' damnation is inevitable. On the other hand, an alternative discourse destabilizes the representation by alluding to free will: slavery (a form of which would be damnation) is now an outcome of the search for freedom from a limited existence, and references to will and volition undermine the inescapability of the characters' fate. Thus, we are introduced to a concern that belongs to Lewis' own cultural and (particularly) philosophical frame of reference, and which, beside the moralistic issues that it raises (the characters' position in life in relation to God and God's decrees), also poses questions about human beings in relation to their own history. Above the image of a man who has lost God's forgiveness, there stands the disturbing portrayal of a tragical life over which hangs a terrible doubt which remains unanswered: were the steps he had taken really his?

CONCLUSION

In this essay we have tried to dissect the complexity of the theme of the passions in *The Monk*. Taking as a departure point the semantic field of passions in the text, we have observed an ambivalent tendency that hinders a stable characterization of these driving forces. The correlation between the characters' freedom and the lack of restriction of their impulses chains together these two concepts, since our liberty to indulge our desires must be restricted, with the aid of a governing reason, to avoid a fatal outcome. The paradoxical arrival at enslavement through the path of freedom is one of the consequences of the problematic relationship between freedom and passion.

Our explanation of the fall of the characters is deeply affected by the confrontation of the discourses of passions and freedom. The picture of a voluntary submission to our inner impulses is combined with the inescapability of yielding to overpowering forces. This reading also opens up the possibilities for the analysis of fate and predestination in the novel, and touches on recurrent themes in Gothic Fiction such as the discovery of a secret plot to effect the protagonist's ruin. All these topics lay on uneven ground due to the indeterminacy of the characterization of passions and free will, which could be a reflection of the difficulties to explain the roles of will, reason and impulses in Lewis' own time. We believe that further analysis of the significance of this manifold discourse of passion and its relation to its cultural and religious context will serve to enlighten our vision of the moral and philosophical conflicts in the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as the role of the literary representation of this conflict in Gothic fiction, taking as an example the complexity of the discourse of passions in *The Monk*.⁸

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