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‘Am I not a Man, whose nature is frail, and prone to error?’ An evaluation of Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* as a work of tragedy.

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Abstract

This dissertation is an argument for the re-evaluation of Matthew Lewis's Ambrosio the Monk as a figure of tragedy instead of villainy. By identifying the characteristics of tragedy within the Gothic text, Ambrosio can be shown to fulfil the tenets of the tragic hero as established by Aristotle. Because of this, the reader can experience the tragic response of catharsis because of the pity and sympathy that Ambrosio as a tragic hero can inspire in the reader.

For sympathy to be extended to the Gothic, a Romantic sensibility of the primacy of the self, analogous to that of the Renaissance humanist, must be established. The development of this Romantic Sensibility is explored with acknowledgment of the influence upon it by the Renaissance tragedians, thus establishing a chain of literary connections from the ancient tragedy to the Romantic Gothic. By recognising the shared humanity of the Gothic villain and the reader, the sympathy and pity necessary for the tragic response is extended to the Gothic villain which is transformed to a figure of tragedy.

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Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Chapter One - 6
The influence of Senecan Tragedy upon the Renaissance tragedians

Chapter Two - 19
The influence of Renaissance tragedians upon Romanticism,
Romantic sensibility and the development of the Romantic Gothic novel

Chapter Three - 36
Identification of the tragic hero, the tragic elements of the Gothic novel,
and the application of these to Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*

Conclusion 56

Bibliography 59

Introduction

In this dissertation my intention is to present my argument for a reassessment of the character of the literary Gothic villain. By identifying the common tragic elements of the Gothic novel, the criminality of the typical Gothic villain may be redetermined as the acts of a tragic hero. In order to do so, it is necessary to acknowledge the need for an extension of sympathy between the reader and the fictional character. From a modern perspective, it is not unusual to study criminals and criminality in order to determine reasons for sociopathic behaviours. Modern criminal psychology and study of formative influences mean we have moved on from the Victorian empiricism of criminality and culpability. The 'scientific' discoveries of physiognomy published by Cesare Lombroso and Havelock Elllis, which claimed criminality as an inherent trait, are now discredited. This modern understanding of the amelioration of the immoral and unlawful due to mitigating circumstances lends itself to a re-examination of the fictional Gothic villain. As the boundaries blur between hero and villain, and the binaries of good and evil are reassessed, then the Gothic villain can be identified with the figures of classical tragedy because of the sympathy that can be extended to both from the reader. In Chapter One, the mechanics of tragedy as codified by Aristotle are discussed. It is necessary to have an appreciation of classical tragedy as its concepts of *katharsis*, *hamartia* and *scelus* will be applied to the Gothic villain in order to establish its heroic credentials.

In this discussion, the Roman verse-tragedies of Seneca will be compared to the Gothic of Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*. As extreme examples of their genre, these texts display easily identifiable tropes. With respect to Gothic generally, Fred Botting said: 'Gothic signifies a writing of excess.'[1] There is an excess of emotion, violence,

[1]Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 1.

disturbance and imagination. Botting went on to say that: '*The Monk* is about excess, about excesses of passion concealed beneath veils of respectability and propriety.'[2] Botting thus defines *The Monk* as representing an excess within the Gothic excess. In the novel, this excess means it is almost parodic in its use of the tropes of the Gothic. Sue Chaplin identified that as an example of horror Gothic, *The Monk* is: 'explicit in its depiction of death and degradation, and replete with abject material detail.'[3] This explicitness ensured that *The Monk* would be the novel that established the popularity of the outrageous Gothic as the earlier Gothic of Walpole and Radcliff had been more subtle. As a subject for study, *The Monk* is therefore representative of what would become the most recognised Gothic form.

Because Senecan verse-tragedy is also identified with excess, it is the tragic form which establishes the clearest connection to the Gothic. The Roman tragedy of Seneca represents the point of excess within its genre in its exploration of the consequences of uncontrolled emotion. Unlike Greek tragedy, Senecan tragedy was visceral and bloody. Emily Wilson said: 'Excess is Seneca's subject, as well as the primary characteristic of his style.'[4] Senecan tragedy offers the most excessive form of classical tragedy as it incorporates on-stage violence and the absolute destruction of the tragic hero as a consequence of unrestrained passions.[5] It is this excess which establishes a connection between the violence and emotion of the Gothic and that of tragedy. Both offer explorations of the extremes of emotion, the supernatural, sex and violence.

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[2] Botting, *Gothic*, p. 77.

[3] Sue Chaplin, *Gothic Literature* (London: York Press, 2011), p. 44.

[4] Emily Wilson, 'Introduction', Seneca, *Six Tragedies,* trans Emily Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. xx.

[5] The term 'on-stage' here refers to the textual descriptions of violence. It is probable that Senecan tragedy was performed in a declamatory mode only and was not fully staged. For more on this Susanna Braund, 'Seneca Multiplex: The Phases (and Phrases) of Seneca's Life and Works', in *The Cambridge Companion to Seneca*, ed. Shadi Bartsch, Alessandro Schiesaro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 28.

It is necessary to establish the literary connections which will demonstrate the influence of tragedy upon Romantic Gothic. Chapter Two will trace the literary influence of Seneca upon Renaissance tragedy; and the subsequent influence of the Renaissance upon the Romantic Gothic novel. This chain of influence is fundamental to the argument of this dissertation as it is the altered perception of the Romantic sensibility which makes it possible to reassess the villainous as tragic. David Punter said: 'Blake, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, and Keats all played a part in shaping the Gothic, in articulating a set of images of terror which were to exercise a potent influence over later literary history.'[6] As the Romantics were influenced by the Renaissance of Shakespeare, so they in turn influenced the development of Gothic.[7] By investigating this influence, the literary connections are established, and the Gothic can be seen to exist as a product of previous literature. Christopher MacLachlan noted that: 'The structure of the novel [*The Monk*] with two plots which reflect each other and converge in a final climax, mimics Shakespearean tragedies [...].'[8] This association between Shakespearean tragedy and *The Monk* will be investigated in order to compare Ambrosio the Monk with recognised figures of tragedy.

There is a sense of Romanticism re-engaging with feelings and sensibility after the rationality of the Enlightenment. David Stevens said: 'In an important sense the Gothic revival was a reaction – to a century or more where rationalism, empiricism and classicism were the dominant ideological forces.'[9] This renewed affirmation of the primacy of emotion over sense allowed the Romantic novel to move away from the

[6] David Punter, *The Literature of Terror* (London: Longman, 1996), p. 87.
[7] For more on the proto-criticism of the symbiotic relationships between the Romantic and the Gothic, see Henry A. Beers *A History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Keegan Paul, 1898) and Eino Railo, *The Haunted Castle: A Study of the Elements of English Romanticism* (London: Routledge, 1927).
[8] Matthew Lewis, *The Monk*, ed. Christopher MacLachlan (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p. xii.
[9] David Stevens, *The Gothic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 19.

novel as a form of instruction, and into a form of imaginative excess. As the Gothic form developed from the Romantic novel, the freedom of emotional excess produced ever more outrageous plots. The Romantic appreciation of the possibilities of the sublime allowed pleasure to be found even in the horrific, and pity to be extended to the unforgivable. The subliminal response whereby pleasure may be derived from the terrifying is shown to be independent of simplistic morality.

Use is made in this dissertation of secondary criticism in establishing the concepts of tragedy, Romanticism, and the Gothic, and the connections which have already been made between them. In the main, this criticism is by established, respected writers, and it is not the purpose of this dissertation to challenge it. What I intend to do is to extend beyond this work in my assertion that the reader of the Gothic may be provoked into the same response of pity and sympathy for the Gothic villain, as for the tragic hero. The Gothic villain, like the tragic hero will provoke the tragic response of *katharsis* (catharsis) if it successfully engages the tragic response of pity and fear from the reader. It is this catharsis that will determine the success of the Gothic villain's transformation to a tragic hero. This will be argued to depend upon both the altered perception of heroism, and upon the sympathy of the individual reader. It is of course immediately apparent that this argument must engage with the critical theories of Barthes, Fish, Iser and other writers on the significance of the reader to the text. Derek Alsop said: 'Only persons can read. Individual readers read on the basis of different personal motives and, unsurprisingly, different particular readings result.'[10] This personalisation of the act of reading, and the acceptance that our responses may vary because of our individuality is commensurate with the primacy of the self in both

[10] Derek Alsop and Chris Walsh, *The Practice of Reading* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1999), p. 3. For a general introduction to reader-response and the wider critical theory, see Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (London: Routledge, 2009).

tragedy and the Gothic. Maynard Mack said: 'Tragedy never tells us what to think; it shows us what we are and may be.'[11] Similarly, in the Gothic, this indeterminacy of the personal interpretation of a text will be explored as a factor in the extension of sympathy between the reader and the tragic hero. The catharsis of the tragic response will be shown to be as integral to the experience of the Gothic reader, as it is to the audience of a tragedy.

[11] Maynard Mack, '*King Lear' in Our Time* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 117.

Chapter One
The influence of Senecan Tragedy upon the Renaissance tragedians

This chapter will establish what is meant by classical 'tragedy' and what influence it had upon English Renaissance tragedy. It will concentrate upon the tragedy of Seneca, because of the acknowledged importance of Seneca upon the Renaissance theatre. The tragic constructions of Seneca are themselves influenced by Aristotle, who writing in the fourth century B. C., developed a series of concepts of tragedy. The works Aristotle studied to produce these concepts included those of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, all Greek writers of the fifth century B. C.. It should be noted, that Aristotle is not offering a definition of the absolutes of tragedy, but rather an identification for the common denominators of the best tragedies in his opinion. These include the concepts of *katharsis*, *hamartia*, *scelus*, and hubris, all of which will be discussed later. Aristotle's writings were often vague and indecisive, but as Gregory A. Staley noted: 'Although Aristotle offers an often opaque and technical discussion of tragedy, his treatment of the subject has affected, both directly and indirectly, almost all subsequent attempts to define the idea of tragedy.'[12] While acknowledging the vagaries of interpretation, the importance of Aristotle to any attempt at deconstruction of the tragic form is indisputable. It is the Aristolian model of tragedy which can be identified in the Roman tragedy of Seneca, and consequently in the work of Senecan influenced Renaissance dramatists.

It is an expectation of tragedy that for the tragic protagonist, there can be no happy ending. George Steiner is sure in his assertion that:

> […] any realistic notion of tragic drama must start from the fact of catastrophe. Tragedies end badly. The tragic personage is broken by forces which can neither be fully understood nor overcome by rational prudence […] tragedy is irreparable. It cannot lead to just and material compensation for past suffering.[13]

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[12] Gregory A. Staley, *Seneca and the Idea of Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 4.
[13] George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), p. 8.

The confident tragic form of the ancient writers allowed their heroes to be utterly damned and lost; for example, Seneca's Oedipus who tears his own eyes from his head in his despair. In Renaissance tragedy, there may be amelioration in order to admit the possibility of redemption and to rouse the pity of the contemporary audience: 'Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say. / The oldest hath borne most: […]'[14] There is an appeal to the audience for the consideration of extenuation in their judgment of Lear. Writing of modern tragedy, Raymond Williams agreed with Steiner: 'The most common interpretation of tragedy is that it is an action in which the hero is destroyed.'[15] The interpretation of the tragic rests upon this enduring tenet of tragedy from ancient to modern readings. It is the destruction of the heroic, and the consequent sympathy engendered, which is integral to this re-assessment of Ambrosio the Monk.

Aristotle said: 'A perfect tragedy should […] imitate actions which excite pity and fear, this being the distinctive mark of tragic imitation.'[16] There are two concepts here that require explanation. This imitation, or *mimesis* is integral to Aristotle's concept of tragedy: 'Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude;'[17] The imitation upon the dramatic stage or in poetry allows the subject to be displayed to an audience. By this, the tragic is explored and the emotive range can be permitted freedom. This imitation of the tragic is integral to the concept of *katharsis* (catharsis), which is the reaction of the audience to the tragic. Catharsis is a concept that is difficult to confine. A disputed term which Aristotle did not fully explain, but suggested that the principle significance and pleasure of tragedy is catharsis. It is intimately connected with the audience's experience of pity and terror.

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[14] William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: Arden, 2004), 5.3.323 – 4.
[15] Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), p. 78.
[16] Aristotle, *Poetics,* in *Theory of Poetry and Fine Art,* ed. and trans. S. H. Butcher (New York: Dover Publications, 1951), p. 45.
[17] Aristotle, *Poetics,* p. 23.

The pity of the audience is aroused by the misfortune, merited or otherwise of the tragic protagonist. Fear or terror is aroused because of the nature of that misfortune. The pity and fear generated in the audience is integral to the concept of catharsis in response to the tragic hero. Catharsis is the psychological property of the audience, but it is questionable if the effect of catharsis is eliminating, purifying or purging or a combination of these.[18] S. H. Butcher said that purging is part of the emotional response to tragedy of pity and fear: 'The painful element in the pity and fear of reality is purged away; the emotions themselves are purged.'[19] The emotional experience is profound but ultimately detached. As an audience we can retain our equanimity in watching, for example, the extremes of Lear's mental anguish because the remoteness and artificiality of the theatre gives a distance for observation. The experience of catharsis for the audience is the benefit of their participation in the tragic event.

Writing in the fifth century B.C., Aeschylus said: 'It is a commonplace in Greek thought that a certain kind of fear is essential to a well-ordered society.'[20] This suggestion that fear is beneficial, is one which accepts that a full emotional range is desirable. This would include all emotions including those which could be perhaps considered to be objectionable, such as anger. In contrast to his teacher Plato, Aristotle agreed with Aeschylus when he acknowledged the part that all the emotions had to play in reasoning and understanding. He argued that anger could be righteous at the appropriate time and in the appropriate circumstances.[21] Seneca would write to warn of

[18] For a detailed discussion of the various interpretations of *katharsis*, see Clifford Leech, 'Cleansing? Or Sacrifice?', in *Tragedy* (London: Methuen & Co., 1969), pp. 47 – 55.
[19] S. H. Butcher, 'The Function of Tragedy', in Aristotle, *Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, p. 254.
[20] Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, 517. Quoted in Elizabeth S. Belfiore, *Tragic Pleasures, Aristotle on Plot and Emotion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 46.
[21] For more on this see Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), II, III: 6 – 12.

the dangers of anger [*Ira*], but his dramas show the full range of the emotions and the consequences of those emotions. For Seneca the unreality of drama is significant:

> For the actor […] stirs an audience by his declamation not when he is angry, but when he plays well the role of the angry man; […] and often the imitation of emotion (*imitation adfectuum*) produces an effect which would not be produced by genuine emotion.[22]

The unreality of drama is its strength as the emotional response of the audience is greater to fictional trauma than to reality. In the Romantic Gothic, this overt fictionality is exploited to provoke a similar excess of emotional engagement.

Classical tragedy does not happen to the poor or humble; it is not concerned with ordinary mortals, unless as the brief playthings of the gods. It is concerned with kings, princes and heroes. Aristotle described the tragic hero as: '[…] a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty. He must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous.'[23] The fall from high to low, is necessary to the concept of the tragic in order to display the *hubris* of the tragic character. Possibly a victim of the *hubris* of overweening ambition or pride, the fall of the tragic protagonist is needed to inspire the pity and fear of the audience. The 'error or frailty' which Aristotle mentions, is further defined as *hamartia*. It is this fatal flaw which means that for the classical tragedian, the tragic hero is responsible for their own downfall. However, the role of Fate must be understood within this concept. Although the actions of the tragic hero can be held as part of the tragic progression, there is an inescapability of this progression. Inevitably, the hero will meet a tragic end.

Senecan tragedy is characterised by excess: with a preoccupation with intense emotions, agonised self-reflection and desire beyond the control or reason. *Hubris* or

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[22] Seneca, *De Ira*, trans. Aubrey Steward, I, vii, quoted in Gregory A. Staley, *Seneca and the Idea of Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 72.
[23] Aristotle, *Poetics*, p. 45.

hamartia will lead inevitably in the purely tragic to the *scelus*. *Scelus* is the unforgivable crime, the point at which the tragic protagonist will step beyond the boundaries of acceptable morality and be utterly destroyed by the consequences of that action. As a Stoic, Seneca believed in the control and the limitability of the human emotional response. His writings of uncontrolled emotions showed the inevitability of the tragic consequences, arguably as a warning to inspire pity and fear in the audience. Passions and desires are out of control. Emotions are shown to be damaging, in particular the hamartia of anger: 'And so we must first of all prove how loathsome and savage a thing anger is, and set before the eyes what a monster a man is when he rages […]'[24] This fury is a factor in many *scelus*: a *hamartia* of rage that leads to passion and violence. Seneca gives an explicit description of Hercules murdering his wife and children through anger:

> He grabs the crying child, and whirls him round
> two or three times in the air, and cracks his head,
> bursting his brains which spatter all over the roof. […]
> Now he bashes his heavy club at his wife:
> he breaks her bones, he tears her head from her body.[25]

It will be discussed further in Chapter Three how even this *scelus* of Hercules does not obviate the heroic quality of the tragic hero.

In Senecan-influenced Shakespeare, rage also leads to terrible violence. In *King Lear*, Cornwall blinds Gloucester in the culmination of his *ira*, the rage of a Medea or Atreus which requires violent and visceral expression by Cornwall: 'See't shalt thou never. Fellows, hold the chair; / Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot.'[26] As a precedent, there are many examples of bloody violence in Senecan tragedy. Oedipus

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[24] Seneca, 'On Anger', in *Dialogues and Essays*, trans. John Davie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 20.
[25] Seneca, *Hercules Furens*, in *Six Tragedies*, trans. Emily Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 168, ll. 1006-18 […] 1024-5.
[26] Shakespeare, *King Lear*, 3.7.66 – 67.

gouges out his own eyes, both Hercules and Medea kill their own children. The influence of this upon the Renaissance dramatists is easily identifiable. Kyd's Hieronimo bites off his own tongue, Webster's Duchess is given a severed hand and her children are murdered, Shakespeare's Lavinia is mutilated. The concept of the *scelus* is exploited as the tragic protagonists explore emotional boundaries. However, there is still an acceptance of the pity and fear the tragic hero provokes. Othello murders Desdemona in anger but he dies heroically: '[…] Then you must speak/ Of one that loved not wisely, but too well;'[27] This demonstrates the concept that the tragic hero must always inspire sympathy, irrespective of their crimes, if the audience is to experience catharsis.

There was an understanding and acceptance of the concept of tragedy in the mediaeval world. Chaucer in the 'Prologue to The Monk's Tale' said:

> I shall lament, and in the tragic mode,
> The sufferings of those who once stood high,
> Who fell from eminence, so that none could
> Deliver them out of adversity.[28]

Within this general knowledge of the tragic state, Seneca became associated with tragedy to the early Renaissance. In *Hamlet*, Polonius can use his name as a verbal shortcut to explain a concept: 'Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light.'[29] Polonius in Hamlet would have needed no gloss to explain his remark to his contemporary audience. To them, Seneca would be synonymous with tragedy of intensity and violence. T. S. Eliot wrote that: 'No author exercised a wider or deeper influence upon the Elizabethan mind or upon the Elizabethan form of tragedy than did

[27] William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. E. A. J. Honigmann (London: Arden, 1998), 5.2.341-2.
[28] Geoffrey Chaucer, 'Prologue to The Monk's Tale', *The Canterbury Tales,* trans. David Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 379.
[29] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (London: Arden, 1997), II. ii. 400 – 401.

Seneca.'[30] The adoption by the Elizabethan dramatists of the Senecan model, demonstrates the parallels between the societal expectations and fears of the Romans for whom Seneca wrote, and those of the Elizabethans.

There is a presumed sociological influence upon Seneca of the troubling times of the Roman court. A. J. Boyle said:

> He [Seneca] witnessed at first hand and participated in the corrupting power, hypocrisy self-abasement and abnormal cruelty defining (or so the ancient historians, especially Tacitus, will have us believe) the early imperial court. The declamatory themes of the school – vengeance, rage, power-lust, incest hideous death, fortune's savagery – were the stuff of his life.[31]

The influence of the life-experiences of Seneca upon his work is evident. Clifford Leech said: 'It is not surprising that the imagery and the subject-matter of these plays is violent, hell-ridden: no one hearing them knew where the Emperor's next blow would fall […]'[32] T. S. Eliot acknowledged that though the affinity between first-century Rome and Elizabethan England may not be obvious, there is a connection:

> But it [Elizabethan England] was a period of dissolution and chaos; and in such a period any emotional attitude which seems to give a man something firm, even if it be only the attitude of "I am myself alone", is eagerly taken up.[33]

This attitude was the Stoicism which underpins Senecan tragedy. Stoicism allows the self-determination of the tragic protagonist. For Stoic Seneca, his tragedies serve as a warning of uncontrolled passions. For the Elizabethan humanist, and subsequently the Romantics, this self-determination is key to the development of the self. When Eliot said that: 'Stoicism is the refuge for the individual in an indifferent or hostile world too big for him […],'[34] he identified a key connection between Senecan tragedy and Renaissance drama. Writing on the Renaissance, J. M. R. Margeson said: 'Dramatists

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[30] T. S. Eliot, 'Seneca in Elizabethan Translation', *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), p. 65.
[31] A. J. Boyle, *Tragic Seneca* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1997), p. 32.
[32] Clifford Leech, *Tragedy* (London: Methuen & Co., 1969), p. 15.
[33] Eliot, 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca', *Selected Essays*, p. 132.
[34] Eliot, 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca', *Selected Essays*, p. 131.

drew from Seneca large characters dominated by great forces of passion as well as the rhetoric to express such passion.'[35] These characters demonstrate the consequences of the loss of emotional control. Margeson does concede a crucial difference between the works of Seneca and Shakespeare: 'If the human heart in Shakespeare is capable of *scelus*, so too does it contain the possibility of restoration and redemption.'[36] As previously discussed, the Shakespearean tragic figure will always contain the remnants of flawed humanity and its consequent exculpation.

Seneca's popularity and rediscovery by the Renaissance humanists is significant because of the humanist reassessment of the primacy of the self within the greater universe. Gordon Braden said:

> Seneca bequeaths to later times some extraordinary standards for the self's ambitions and some ways of realising those ambitions dramatically, in a rhetoric of psychic aggression that seemingly allows a character to make himself and his world up out of his own words.[37]

Seneca's Medea demonstrates this drive to assert her complete psychological determinism and independence when she says: 'Now, I am Medea,'[38] before destroying her own children to revenge herself upon Jason. Similarly, in Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* the Duchess retains her selfhood: 'I am Duchess of Malfi still,'[39] in spite of the horrifying violence and the attempts to dislocate the Duchess from reality. The essence of self remains. As Hamlet dies, he is concerned with his legacy:

> Horatio, I am dead, […]
> O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,
> Things standing thus unknown, shall I leave behind me.[40]

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[35] J. M. R. Margeson, *The Origins of English Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 30.
[36] Margeson, *The Origins of English Tragedy*, p. 32.
[37] Gordon Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 62.
[38] Seneca, *Medea* in *Six Tragedies*, p. 98, l. 910.
[39] John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. Leah S. Marcus (London: Arden, 2017), 4.2.137.
[40] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 5. 2. 337 […] 349 – 350.

This is an association of the Renaissance humanist with the Roman Senecan construction of selfhood within the Stoic universe. Thomas Kyd's the *Spanish Tragedy* can be considered as the proto-Elizabethan tragedy.[41] Its hero, Hieronimo, follows the tragic arc as he changes from a morally stable man into a crazed avenger. Committed to his tragic destiny, his declamatory style not only echoes that of Seneca, but actively adapts Seneca's *Agamemnon*:

> Then stay, Hieronimo, attend their will
> For mortal men may not appoint their time.
> *Per scelus semper tutum est sceleribus iter.*
> [The safe way to crime is always through crime]
> Strike and strike home where wrong is offered thee,
> For evils unto ills conductors be,[42]

As Hieronimo centralises the self within the ordered universe of Senecan stoicism, there is a third person distancing, typical of the Senecan Medea, and Hercules in *Hercules Furens*. Hieronimo is able to construct his tragic persona as a conscious, separate entity. For the audience, this offers a reassurance of the distance between reality and fiction which is necessary for the enjoyment of tragedy.

The influence of Seneca upon Shakespeare can be traced both in form and content. Robert S. Miola identifies the breadth of Seneca's influence: 'Seneca continually provides Shakespeare with clusters of rhetorical and thematic ideas that shape his articulation of the tragic experience.'[43] It is Shakespeare's first tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*, which is perhaps most obviously imitative of Senecan thematic tropes. *Titus* is a play of excess of all emotions. The opening scene alone contains two burials, one human sacrifice, a filicide, rebellion and treachery. The violence of the play is

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[41] See David Bevington, 'Introduction', in Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, ed. David Bevington (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 2 – 3, for a discussion on the genesis of Elizabethan tragedy.
[42] Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, III. Xiii. 3 – 8. See the footnote to this for more on the textual comparison with *Agamemnon.*
[43] Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy, The Influence of Seneca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 9.

delivered in what Miola defined as: 'the soaring excesses of Seneca speech.'[44] The play openly references Seneca's *Phaedra*, and follows some of the plot lines of *Thyestes*. J. C. Maxwell noted: 'Two sons are served up at the banquet in both *Seneca* and *Titus* […] there are elaborate preparations for the killing, the killer is also the cook.'[45] In *Thyestes*, Atreus murders his nephews and serves them to his brother Thyestes:

> The entrails ripped from the living children's bellies
> quiver, their veins throb, the heart still beats in fear;
> but he sorts through the innards, checks the omens,
> and scans the still-hot markings of the veins.
> Once he was happy with the victims, he devoted himself
> to his brother's dinner. He himself carved up
> the body into segments, chopped the broad shoulders
> down to the trunk, sawed through the biceps, laid bare
> the limbs and chopped the bones – the cruel monster![46]

There is a wealth of gruesome detail, necessary for effect as Senecan drama was declamatory and probably unstageable. *Titus Andronicus* can be less descriptive, as much of the violence can be enacted upon the stage:

> Hark, villains, I will grind your bones to dust,
> And with your blood and it I'll make a paste,
> And of the paste a coffin I will rear,
> And make two pasties of your shameful heads.[47]

The horrifying sight of the monstrous cook violating all the rules of hospitality as the ultimate taboo of cannibalism is violated, is an example of *scelus*. Seneca emphasised the danger of anger, and it is the same 'unholy rage'[48] of *Thyestes* and *Hercules Furens*, which drives Titus to his destruction. Miola argued that this is proof of Shakespeare's influences: 'Seneca's depictions of forbidden passion and unspeakable crime (*scelus*), his revelation of the hell deep within the human soul, clearly excited the author of *Titus*

[44] Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy*, p. 11.
[45] J. C. Maxwell, 'Introduction', in William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. J.C. Maxwell (London: Arden, 1953), p. x.
[46] Seneca, *Thyestes*, in *Six Tragedies*, p. 202, ll 755 – 763.
[47] William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. Jonathan Bate (London: Arden, 2015), 5.2. 186-9.
[48] Seneca, *Thyestes* in *Six Tragedies*, p. 201, l. 713.

Andronicus.'[49] Shakespeare would develop the theme of *scelus* in subsequent tragedies such as *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. The *scelus* which is at the root of the tragic plot, is one which is produced by the failure of the protagonists to control their emotional response. There will be a development of this self-indulgence in the imaginative excess of Romantic Gothicism.

It is not only by the excessive violence that Senecan influence can be identified in Shakespeare. In the impassioned rhetoric of Titus, there is an affinity to Seneca in both form and idea. In Seneca's *Phaedra*, the outraged Hippolytus cries: 'Great ruler of gods! / Are you so slow to hear and see the works of sin?'[50] By comparison, Titus also declaims: '*Magni dominator poli, / Tam lentus audis sclera tam lentus vides?* [Ruler of great heavens, are you so slow to hear crimes, so slow to see?]'[51] Although there is a difference in tone and situation, (incestuous lust in *Phaedra*, a daughter violated in *Titus*,) they are similar in their appeal to a wider, presumably sympathetic universe to come to their aid. Both are Stoical in tone as they reaffirm the hegemony of the organized network of the universe and their position within it. A.C. Bradley discussed the construction of the tragic hero within the established rational universe and the morality of that universe. 'Let us attempt then to re-state the idea that the ultimate power in the tragic world is a moral order. Let us put aside the ideas of justice and merit, and speak simply of good and evil.'[52] He argued that in general, because any imperfection or defect is evil in the wider sense of the word, then even the 'comparatively innocent hero' will be relentlessly punished by the ultimate moral power of the stoical universe. So, the evils of pride, or sexual desire or even irresolution will inevitably lead to catastrophe in the tragic. The ultimate moral power of the universe

[49] Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy*, p. 29.
[50] Seneca, *Phaedra,* in *Six Tragedies,* p. 21, ll. 672-3.
[51] Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, 4.1. 81 – 82.
[52] A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 22.

will react against this evil and relentlessly punish. In classical tragedy there can be no happy ending, even for the seemingly innocent such as Romeo or Juliet, because of the evil of the senseless hatred of their houses. In Senecan-influenced tragedy, there is an acknowledgment of a greater moral power, of Fate or Providence, that will ultimately determine the tragic trajectory.

For the audience of tragedy, both classical and Renaissance, a necessary part of the cathartic response is the ability to maintain a distancing from the events. Although sympathy is needed to produce the tragic response of pity and terror, the freedom to experience these is produced by the reassurance of the fictionality of the tragedy. The theatre becomes an emotional safe space in which the audience can experience catharsis. In classical tragedy, emotional spacing is created by the use of the divine and socially elite as the tragic protagonists. The Renaissance tragedians also introduce both social and historical spacing between their audience and their characters. However, Seneca's heroes do not anticipate forgiveness and eternal life; Shakespeare and his contemporaries have to cope with the vexatious issue of a redemptive faith. The reassurance of a benevolent Christian afterlife can be seen to diminish the effect of the destruction of the tragic hero. Webster, Shakespeare and Kyd all join in neutralising this by either employing an unformed, pagan world (*Titus*, *King Lear* etc.), or by presenting a corrupt, Catholic faith, presumed alien to the post-reformation English audience (*Duchess of Malfi*, *The Spanish Tragedy*). The morally corrupt Catholics do not uphold the Christian virtues and therefore cannot be redeemed in the Christian sense. The Christian audience can now experience full tragic expectation. Later, these distancing mechanisms will be employed by the Romantic Gothic to produce similar reactions of pity and terror in the readership. The tragic play displays the life of the tragic individual as it spirals into irreparable catastrophe; the audience is horrified but

fascinated and inevitably experiences the catharsis of an emotional response. Seneca's tragedies of excess influenced not only Shakespeare, but the wider genre of Renaissance revenge tragedy. It is this influence that the Romantics would in turn be influenced by in their re-discovery of the Renaissance model of literary humanism and the centralization of the self. The construction of the tragic hero for the Renaissance, and later the Romantics, would be one in which the fallibility of humanity is acknowledged, and the concept of heroism could be redefined.

Chapter Two
The Influence of Renaissance tragedians upon Romanticism and the development of the Romantic Gothic novel

After the rationalism of the Enlightenment, the development of Romanticism offered a return and reassessment of the engagement with the imagination with respect to self-realization and fulfilment. Jonathan Bate said: 'If we had to pick out a single premise at the core of English Romanticism, it would probably be the ascription of a central place to the power of the creative imagination, a belief that imagination, genius and poetry are closely associated with each other.'[53] This creative imagination would be assigned a central role as the Romantic novel developed its most outrageous form; the Gothic novel. Rousseau is recognised as the first philosopher of Romanticism and it was his writings and popularity in France which would establish the new mores of the Romantics.[54] Maurice Cranston emphasised the importance of the self to Rousseau and consequently to the Romantics: '[…] to Rousseau, and the Romantics who came after him, the self was the object of the highest and most enduring interest.'[55] From this developed the notion that human behaviour is governed by passion instead of reason, in opposition to the rationalists and neo-classicists of the Enlightenment. Cranston also pointed out that: 'It is one of the ironies of history that the first philosopher of Romanticism in England should have been one of the most savage critics of Rousseau, Edmund Burke.'[56] However, Burke's differences with Rousseau were political rather than literary as he believed that Rousseau's ideas were one of the causes of the French Revolution. Burke's *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of our Ideas on the Sublime*

[53] Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 6. **F**or more on theories of the imagination and the rise of Romanticism, see M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958).
[54] For more on this see, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, trans. Philip Steward and Jean Vache (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1997).
[55] Maurice Cranston, *The Romantic Movement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 13.
[56] Cranston, *The Romantic Movement,* p. 48.

and the Beautiful, written in 1756 was: 'an attack on rationalist and classical formalism in art and an argument for what was afterwards known as romantic aesthetics.'[57] Although not all of Burke's ideas would prove to be enduring, his exploration of the sublime is an explanation of how the terror and pity of tragedy, and the atrocities of terrorist Gothic, could be recognised as pleasurable.

There was widespread recognition of the influence of the Renaissance writers, in particular Shakespeare, upon English Romanticism. Coleridge lectured and wrote extensively in order to express his acknowledgment of his influences. It would be Coleridge who would come to represent a link between the Renaissance and the Gothic as he explored the medievalism and the supernatural in works such as 'Christabel' and 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. The pre-rational and the supernatural would become an integral component as the Romantic novel extended into what would come to be known as the Gothic. Gothic novelists would use this freedom of imagination and the supremacy of the self to express and engage with contemporary anxieties.

Romanticism can be seen to develop from the political thinking of Rousseau on liberty and equality, to the narrow literary sense of the centralisation of the self and the imagination, and their freedom from the purely rational. There is a yearning to be part of nature which had been missing since the rationalist philosophy and neoclassical art which was prevalent post-Renaissance. A. K. Thorlby saus: 'That Rousseau first explored the new self-awareness of the solitary is now widely acknowledged; some scholars even blame him for the emergence itself of Romantic subjectivity.'[58] Rousseau's *Lettres de Deux Amans*, later known as *Julie ou la Nouvelle Heloise*, published in 1761, illustrates his commitment to the illustration of the emotions and

[57] Cranston, *The Romantic Movement*, p. 48.
[58] A.K. Thorlby, *The Romantic Movement* (London: Longmans, 1966), p. 7.

anxieties of the self. Rousseau explored the self-awareness of the solitary, developing the expression of the subjectivity of the Romantic world-view. His views were developed by his contemporary Diderot, who also celebrated the self-realization and the uniquely individual and who venerated the imagination even within science. Diderot's doctrine of the uninhibited expression of individuality leads to a re-evaluation of morality. Diderot said:

> I hate all of those sordid little things that reveal only an abject soul, but I do not hate great crimes, first because beautiful paintings and great tragedies are made out of them, and secondly because noble and sublime deeds share with great crimes the same quality of energy.[59]

In this loosening of the moral imperative in order to permit the ultimate expression of Romanticism, i.e., self-determination, the first roots of terrorist Gothic can be recognised. Gothic villains such as Ambrosio The Monk can be identified as expressing this commitment to the self. As the Gothic novelists would exploit, pleasure can be identified in the outrageous and the horrific because of the sublime. F. L. Lucas discussed this:

> The Romantic intoxication of the imagination suspends the over-rigid censorship exerted by our sense of what is fact and our sense of what is fitting. The first of these dominates the extreme Realist; both inhibit the extreme Classic; the Romantic escapes.[60]

After the neo-Classicism of the Enlightenment, the Romantic ideology permits the exploration beyond reality and beyond morality, first in poetry such as Coleridge's 'Christabel', and later in Gothic novels such as *The Monk*.

Integral to the development of the Romantic imagination, was the concept of the sublime. Edmund Burke endeavoured to empirically define the conceptual:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger […]or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is

[59] Denis Diderot, quoted in Cranston, *The Romantic Movement*, p. 19.
[60] F. L. Lucas, 'Faeries and Fungi; or the Future of Romanticism' in Thorlby, *The Romantic Movement*, p. 63.

> a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.[61]

Like Diderot, Burke has moved beyond the normal definitions of morality or pleasure. He argues that terror becomes pleasure if there is no danger to the self. That is, if the self survives the experience, then the emotion can be enjoyed. Thus, the fear of a raging storm or a perilous mountain - the literally awe-inspiring - is transfigured. In art, as well as poetry, the appreciation of the sublime meant that the structurally imposing or ugly, e.g. a ruined castle, could become a source of beauty.[62] This would become a stock content of the novels of the Gothic revival by writers such as Ann Radcliffe. It is this transformation of pain to pleasure which can be traced in the audience response to the tragic. The catharsis of the audience can be provoked as the terror is distanced and the self is not harmed; so pleasure is produced in spite of the pity and fear.

In English Romanticism, the poets Wordsworth and Coleridge, among others, were instrumental in the development of the Romantic in poetry. Rene Wellek defined the Romantic as: ‘A view of poetry centred on the expression and communication of emotion.’[63] However, within this general overview, there was room for differences of interpretation. Working together, Wordsworth and Coleridge produced *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. Cranston found this to be a defining moment of Romanticism: ‘[This] probably did more than any other single work to redirect English taste from the neo-classical to the Romantic.’[64] Within this work, both poets contributed to what would later be regarded as key characteristics of the Romantic. Wordsworth was inspired by nature and the naturalistic; for example, ‘Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern

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[61] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 36.
[62] For an ironic illustration of the primacy of the picturesque over taste, see Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. Susan Fraiman (New York: Norton, 2004), pp. 76 – 77.
[63] Rene Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism, 1750 – 1950,* vol. 2, *The Romantic Age* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), p. 3.
[64] Cranston, *The Romantic Movement*, p. 58.

Abbey' and 'Old Man Travelling'. His writing placed humanity within the natural and his expression of the self is one which is commensurate with this view. In contrast, Coleridge was inspired by the unseen world, and in 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', which was the first poem of the collection in its original edition, he developed his doctrine of the supremacy of the imagination above the naturalistic. The subsequent dissention between Coleridge and Wordsworth over their individual interpretation of the sovereignty of the imagination is one which foreshadows the division between critical appreciation of the Romantic novel compared to the Gothic novel. In a similar way in which Gothic would divide popular and critical opinion, Wordsworth would turn upon Coleridge's imaginative writing and say that: 'The poem of my Friend has indeed great defects;'[65] in both character and in form. In his preface to the 1800 edition, where 'Rime' was relegated to last place in the text, Wordsworth would insist that poetry must have a 'worthy purpose.'[66] His development of the theories of naturalism, was a fundamental difference between himself and Coleridge. Coleridge was excited by the opportunities offered for the psychological insight which would be explored by the freedom of 'pure imagination.'[67] The use of the supernatural, such as the polar spirits in 'Rime', freed the narrative from the prosaic and allowed the reader the emotional distance previously mentioned which is inherent to the sublime and the tragic.

In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge wrote that his aim in *Lyrical Ballads* was to show:

> […] the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination.[68]

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[65] William Wordsworth, Letters, vol. 1, quoted in Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. Celia de Piro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 194.
[66] William Wordsworth, 'Preface of 1800' in Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 230.
[67] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Table Talk,* 31 May 1830, quoted in S. T. Coleridge, *Coleridge: The Ancient Mariner and other Poems*, ed. Alun R. Jones and William Tydeman (London: Macmillan, 1985), p. 30.
[68] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. George Watson (London: Dent, 1971), p. 168.

This gave scope for both his own and Wordsworth's interpretation of the freedom of imagination. However, while Coleridge was happy to allow space for both interpretations, Wordsworth became increasingly reactionary to the extremes of imagination as the Romantic novel developed its Gothic form. Wordsworth wrote:

> The invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespear [sic] and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse.[69]

This is interesting in view of the profound admiration that Coleridge had for the works of Shakespeare, and the influence that Shakespeare exercised upon the Romantic sensibility. As Coleridge's 'pure imagination' foreshadows the Gothic excesses to come, so he is a link to Senecan-influenced Renaissance tragedy in his acknowledgment of the influence of Shakespeare upon the Romantic sensibility.

Although other writers such as Webster and Kyd influenced Romantic writing as it developed towards the Gothic, it is the influence of Shakespeare upon the Romantic writers that is most widely acknowledged. Jonathan Bate even makes the claim that this admiration amounted to adoration: 'It is a commonplace [...] that the Romantics worshipped Shakespeare.'[70] This worship can be seen in both the critical writings as the Romantics reassessed the works of Shakespeare, and the influence upon their own work. It is Shakespeare's expression of the interiority of the character which allies himself with the Romantic sensibility. Charles Lamb expressed this thus:

> But in all the best dramas, and in Shakespeare above all, how obvious it is, that the form of *speaking*, whether it be in soliloquy or dialogue, is only a medium, and often a highly artificial one, for putting the reader or spectator into possession of that knowledge of the inner structure and workings of mind in a character, which he could otherwise never have arrived at *in that form of composition* by any gift short of intuition.[71]

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[69] William Wordsworth, 'Preface of 1800', in Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads,* p. 232.
[70] Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination*, p. 3.
[71] Charles Lamb 'On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, considered with reference to their fitness for stage representation.' in Jonathan Bate, (ed.), *The Romantics on Shakespeare* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 114.

That is, the purpose of the play is to show the interiority of the self, which the Romantics would hold to be fundamental to their philosophy of imagination. The mechanics of the play are secondary to the expression of the psychology of the character which is displayed to the audience. In the Gothic also, the artificiality of situations and emotions extended the emotional response.

William Hazlitt identified the importance of the universality of Shakespeare:

> The striking peculiarity of Shakespeare's mind was its generic quality, its power of communication with all other minds – so that it contained a universe of thought and feeling within itself, and had no one peculiar bias, or exclusive excellence more than another.[72]

This is an appreciation that the reason Shakespeare appeals to all is through his neutrality. Shakespeare has no philosophy; he offers all philosophies for consideration. Keats commented on this:

> […] It struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously – I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reach after fact and reason.[73]

This concept of 'Negative Capability' identified by Keats means that Shakespeare can be an author for all readers. Further, 'Negative Capability' means that Shakespeare's flawed heroes such as Othello are not evaluated, but instead are allowed to speak and offer themselves for the audience's final judgement:

> […] Then you must you speak
> Of one that loved not wisely, but too well;
> Of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought,
> Perplexed in the extreme; […][74]

This offering of the tragic, while betraying its Senecan origins in the open display of the consequences of poor choices, allows the audience the privilege of an individual

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[72] William Hazlitt, 'On Shakespeare and Milton', in Bate, *The Romantics on Shakespeare*, p. 181.
[73] John Keats, Letter to George and Tom Keats, 21 December 1817 in *Romanticism An Anthology*, ed. Duncan Wu, Second Edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 1019.
[74] Shakespeare, *Othello*, 5.2.ll. 341 – 344.

response. It is this heterogeneity of response which will allow the Gothic villain to be identified as the ultimate Romantic hero because of the ambiguity of the subliminal morality.

It is Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who wrote and lectured extensively upon Shakespeare, who forms a clear link between the Senecan inspired excess of Shakespeare, to the imaginative excess of the Gothic. He identifies Shakespeare's affinity with the Romantic preoccupation with the natural in a lecture note:

> Nature, the prime genial artist, inexhaustible in diverse powers, is equally inexhaustible in forms; - each exterior is the physiognomy of the being within, - its true image reflected and thrown out from the concave mirror; - and even such is the appropriate excellence of her chosen poet, of our own Shakespeare, - himself a nature humanized, a genial understanding directing self-consciously a power and an implicit wisdom deeper even than our consciousness.[75]

The external here relates to the interior, and it is the interior that is being explored by the dramatists. Coleridge emphasises the primacy of the natural to Shakespeare, even when that power is deeper than humanity can relate to. Shakespeare's willingness to explore the unexplained was well documented. In 1709 Nicholas Rowe in the first illustrated edition of *The Works* said: 'But certainly the greatness of this Author's genius do's nowhere so much appear as where he gives his Imagination an entire Loose, and raises his Fancy to a flight above Mankind and the Limits of the visible World.'[76] Shakespeare uses fancy and supernatural in his plays in a light-hearted manner, i.e. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as well as in the tragic mode. In the tragedies such as *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, the supernatural is employed as an expansion of the natural comprehension . For example, the fear engendered in Macbeth by the appearance of Banquo's ghost, allows his inner turmoil and fragmentation to be displayed:

Macbeth. Which of you have done this?

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[75] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, from a lecture note (1812 – 13), ed. H. N. Coleridge as 'Shakespeare's Judgement equal to his Genius', in Bate, *The Romantics on Shakespeare*, p. 128.

[76] Nicholas Rowe, 'Introduction to *The Works* (1709)', in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage 1623 - 1801*, ed. Brian Vickers (6 vols), (Abingdon: Routledge 1974 – 1981), ii, p. 197.

> *Lords*. What, my good Lord?
> *Macbeth*. Thou canst not say, I did it: never shake
> Thy gory locks at me.[77]

David Punter and Glennis Byron theorized that the psychological disorder engendered by the supernatural within the text, could be related to its author's own psychological needs: 'The numerous ghosts and spectres in Coleridge's poetry were, critics usually opine, related to his own pervasive feeling of guilt.'[78] Whether this is true or not, it cannot be disputed that as a writer of the Romantic, Coleridge expanded upon the supernatural as a means of poetic expression in his most Gothic works. 'Rime' and 'Christabel' are examples of how Shakespeare's authorisation of the fanciful in an authentic drama influenced Coleridge in his exploration of sensibility.

Shakespeare's most famously psychologically complex character, Hamlet, was one with whom the Romantics naturally identified. Jonathan Bate emphasised the significance of this upon the development of the Romantic hero: 'The Romantics' reinvention of Hamlet as a paralysed Romantic was their single most influential critical act.'[79] This reinvention of Hamlet, a character paralysed by his own inner reflections and doubts, into an authentically Romantic hero is the genesis of the proto-Gothic hero. The recognition that a tragic hero can be an unsympathetic character but can still be responded to with pity and terror was not new: Seneca's *Hercules Furens* murders his family but retains sympathy. What was new and important for the Romantics was the emphasis upon the internal conflict of the tragic hero. This internal conflict must be demonstrated to allow the audience to witness the disintegration of the personality. In terrorist Gothic, internal and external disintegration and confusion ultimately developed

[77] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Kenneth Muir (London: Arden, 2006), III. iv. 47 – 50.
[78] David Punter and Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 15.
[79] Bate, (ed.), *The Romantics on Shakespeare*, p. 2.

into Gothic indeterminacy. The Gothic villain can be seen as a victim of that disintegration.

In the Romantics' discussion of Hamlet there is an identification of the flawed hero. Hazlitt said: 'Hamlet is as little of the hero as a man can be […].'[80] There is a realisation and a recognition here of the humanity of Hamlet. He is irresolute and undecided, makes poor choices, spares Claudius but murders Polonius. The construction of the Gothic villain as a hero engages with this recognition of the flawed hero. In a reported conversation between Byron and Shelley, Shelley identified what it is that allows the audience or the reader to sympathise with the unheroic Hamlet:

> Byron: 'Yet – O I am sick of this most lame and impotent hero!' Shelley: 'And yet we recognize in him something that we cannot but love and sympathise with, and a grandeur of tone which we instinctively reverence.'[81]

This acknowledgement by Shelley of the sympathy between the tragic hero and the audience, is a typically Romantic response to the tragic. In his *Lectures* Hazlitt also acknowledged the audience's response to the tragic as being one which is dependent upon the subjectivity of the personal response: 'It has been said that tragedy purifies the affections by terror and pity. That is, it substitutes imaginary sympathy for mere selfishness.'[82] The extension of sympathy indicates a willingness to engage with the fear and to experience a form of catharsis, subjective because it is not an empirical quality. The importance of the introspective Hamlet to the developing Romantic sensibility was also commented on by Frederick Schlegel:

> *Hamlet* is singular in its kind: a tragedy of thought inspired by continual and never-satisfied mediation on human destiny and the dark perplexity of the events of this world, and calculated to call forth the very same meditation in the minds of the spectators.[83]

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[80] Hazlitt, 'On Shakespeare and Milton', in Bate, *The Romantics on Shakespeare*, p. 325.
[81] 'Byron in conversation with Shelley', in Bate, *The Romantics on Shakespeare*, p. 338.
[82] Hazlitt, 'Lectures', in Bate, *The Romantics on Shakespeare*, p. 482.
[83] Frederick Schlegel, *Lectures on the History of Literature ancient and modern,* 'Lectures XXV', trans. John Black, (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1815), quoted in Bate, *The Romantics on Shakespeare*, p. 307.

The self-absorption which is typical of the Romantic sensibility, is here assigned to the tragic hero. Thus, an irremediably flawed hero can be viewed with sympathy by the Romantic audience who are irresistibly complicit because of their shared humanity. This reassessment of the tragic hero as one whom is inescapably human is significant to the reappraisal of the Gothic villain as a victim of tragedy.

Although it is the Romantic poets who have been discussed so far, it is in the novel form that the Romantic sensibility would find its apotheosis as the Gothic novel expanded the role of the imagination and the supernatural in fiction. Ian Watt says: '[Romanticism] was characterised by the emphasis on individualism and originality which had found its first literary expression in the novel.'[84] It is therefore a natural progression for Romanticism to find its own novelistic outlet. Previously the novel had been rooted in the actual: the picaresque adventures of Fielding's *Tom Jones* never stray from the bounds of the possible. Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* spend his adventures upon his island imposing his English sensibilities and social structures upon the exotic. Richardson's *Clarissa* and *Pamela* are tales of moral significance for their readers. These novels although presenting a fictitious narrative, are based in the realities of their readers. It must be acknowledged that Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is a notable exception in its breadth of imagination; but as a novel it uses imaginative adventures as a framework for political and sociological commentary which can overshadow the entertainment for the discerning reader. A distinction was becoming apparent between the novel and the romance. Clara Reeve in 1785 summed this up: 'The Novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it was written. The Romance in lofty and elevated language, describes what has never happened nor is likely to.'[85]

[84] Ian Watt, *Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), p. 301.
[85] Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance* (Dublin, 1785), p. 111.

This acknowledgment of the distinction between the Novel and the Romance is a development of the argument that Horace Walpole had engaged with twenty years earlier:

> It [*The Castle of Otranto*] was an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Invention has not been wanting; but the great resources of fancy have been damned up […].[86]

Walpole was conscious that naturalism is needed in order to give a verisimilitude to the circumstances surrounding the supernatural and wildly imaginative events. Like the poets discussed previously, Walpole was influenced by the Renaissance dramatist: 'That great master of nature, Shakespeare, was the model I copied.'[87] While acknowledging Walpole's intentions, it must be recognised that there is nothing naturalistic about *The Castle of Otranto*. As the proto-gothic novel, it set the tone of outrageous supernaturalism that would become the motif of the Gothic. Robert Kiely said: '*The Castle of Otranto*, despite the presence of a few workaday servants, is a romance of the most excessively improbably sort.'[88] It is this exploration of the improbable that would eventually define the Gothic novel.

It could be suggested that Walpole's failure to reconcile the grandeur of the epic with the Shakespearian mastery of the natural set a precedent for subsequent critical suspicion of the Gothic novel. Part of Coleridge's criticism of *The Monk* rested not upon the outrageous imagination on display, but on Lewis's mis-handling of the familiar. Coleridge finds the depiction of the lengths Ambrosio will go to satisfy his lust to be: '[…] not preternatural, but contrary to nature.'[89] Coleridge's point rests upon

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[86] Horace Walpole, 'Preface to the Second Edition', *The Castle of Otranto*, in *Three Gothic Novels*, ed. Mario Praz (London: Penguin, 1968), p. 43.
[87] Walpole, 'Preface', p. 44.
[88] Robert Kiely, *The Romantic Novel in England* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1973), p. 5.
[89] S. T. Coleridge, 'Review of Lewis's *The Monk* (1797)', in Rictor Norton, *Gothic Readings, The First Wave, 1764 – 1840* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), p.298.

his claim that we will accept the fanciful because we can never determine if that is true or not, but the mis-representation of the natural feelings and morals that are common to us all offends the judgement of the reader. This type of criticism is damning as the Gothic novel aspired to literary credibility. In *The Monk* this takes the form of the studiously academic chapter headings imitating Horace and others, and the ballads within the text. Coleridge found merit in this: 'The poetry interspersed through the volumes is, in general, far above mediocrity.'[90] This praise by Coleridge helped to establish Lewis's Romantic credentials, and mark *The Monk* as a work in the Romantic tradition. John Berryman claimed that Lewis 'helped to recover poetry'[91] for the novel. While this is a large claim open to dispute, later Romantic novels by authors such as Scott, Hogg and Emily Bronte would prove that employing themes of the supernatural and uncanny did not impede the lyrical and poetical values of novels.

The Gothic novel is associated with the social order of the times which produce it. Christopher MacLachlan said: 'It is now accepted wisdom that the precarious universe of Gothic fiction is a reflection of its times.'[92] The novels express deep disquiets and anxieties about the times in which they are set, but offer no solutions apart from the polarisation of good and evil, and the opportunity to explore the taboo and extremes of barbarism. William Hazlitt claimed that the components of the Gothic: 'derived part of the interest, no doubt, from the supposed tottering state of all structures at the time.'[93] The Gothic is produced at a time of revolution and an increasing secularisation and rationalisation of the divine. Fred Botting said:

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[90] S. T. Coleridge, 'Review of Lewis's *The Monk* (1797)', Norton, *Gothic Readings, The First Wave,* p. 299.
[91] John Berryman, 'Introduction', in Matthew Lewis, *The Monk* **,** ed. Louis F. Peck (New York: Grove Press, 1952), p. 27.
[92] Christopher MacLachlan, 'Introduction', in Matthew Lewis, *The Monk*, ed. Christopher MacLachlan (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p. xxi.
[93] William Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907), p. 73.

> Uncertainties about the nature of power, law, society, family and sexuality dominate Gothic fiction. They are linked to wider threats of disintegration manifested most forcefully in political revolution. The decade of the French Revolution was also the period when the Gothic novel was at its most popular.[94]

The binary polarisation of good and evil, right and wrong set within tottering castles in Gothic texts offer certainties at times of social uncertainty. Maggie Kilgour identified this as a yearning for the past and notes:

> Like Romanticism, the gothic [sic] is especially a revolt against a mechanistic or atomistic view of the world and relations, in favour of recovering an earlier organic model. The gothic is symptomatic of a nostalgia for the past which idealises the medieval world […].[95]

The medievalism is expressed not just in the settings of tottering ruins, but also in a return to a more superstitious belief system. The anti-Catholicism which will be explored more fully in Chapter Three is used as a vehicle for the display of superstition above faith. The imagination is allowed to develop beyond the supernaturality of faith without blasphemy because the Catholic faith can be relegated to cant and meaningless ritual.

The primacy of the supernatural in the Gothic is part of its structure of medievalism. A return to a less rationalist time allows the unexplained to operate in a climate of suspended disbelief. The supernatural of the Gothic, is analogous to the use of ancient gods in tragedy; it inspires fear of forces beyond human understanding. This allows psychological exploration due to the expansion of the human experience. Coleridge was aware of this and his aim in *Lyrical Ballads* was to explore this:

> […] The incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real.[96]

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[94] Botting, *Gothic*, p. 5.
[95] Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 11.
[96] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, p. 168.

In 'Rime', Coleridge employed what he termed: 'that willing suspension of belief'[97] in order to allow the supernatural to form what appears to be a naturalistic narrative. Coleridge summarised here what the Gothic novelists, consciously or otherwise, would do. When considering the establishment of what would be codified as 'The Gothic', E. J. Clery said: 'Works like *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Monk* […] will here be seen as breakthroughs in the difficult overcoming of barriers to the fictional use of the marvellous.[98]' Once those barriers have been overcome, the marvellous in fiction becomes subject to an escalation of imagination.

It has already been stated that Gothic is about excess. As Seneca has been discussed as the furthest point of tragedy, so Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* can be identified as the ultimate expression of the Gothic novel. Written in 1795, in the wake of the French Revolutionary Terror, it has been claimed to be: 'The first horror novel in English literature.'[99] In its portrayal of lust, rape, incest, violence, magic, torture and blasphemy, it shocked a nation. It achieved condemnation for its criticism of the Bible as well as its obscenity. The Marquis de Sade placed *The Monk* firmly in the context of a response to the horrors of the French Revolution: 'Let us concur that this kind of fiction, whatever one may think of it, is assuredly not without merit: 'twas the inevitable result of the revolutionary shocks which all of Europe has suffered […]'[100] As an expression of the Romantic imagination and Revolutionary disturbance, *The Monk* represented the furthest point at the time that the sympathy of the reader could extend to. Robert Miles said: 'With nearly every feature of *The Monk* one can find a precedent

[97] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, p. 169.
[98] E. J. Clery: *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction 1762 – 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 1.
[99] Nick Groom, 'Introduction', in Matthew Lewis, *The Monk*, ed. Howard Anderson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. vii.
[100] Marquis de Sade, 'Reflections on the Novel.' ['Idee sur les romans'], in *The 120 days of Sodom*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse and Richard Seaver (London: Arrow, 1990), p. 108.

for everything, and yet *The Monk* was shockingly new, because is inverted, parodied or exaggerated the features it cannibalized.'[101] The supernatural of *The Monk* is very real, and its display of binary absolutes allows no ambiguity of the consequences of transgressions. The character of the Monk himself, Ambrosio, will be shown to demonstrate the worst excesses of the Gothic villain, but it will be argued that as a product of the literature of Romanticism, even he can be interpreted as a victim of tragedy.

Coleridge, a supporter of pure imagination, found that ultimately *The Monk* was the most excessive of Gothic excess:

> Not without reluctance then, but in full conviction that we are performing a duty, we declare it to be our opinion, that the Monk is a romance, which if a parent saw in the hands of a son or daughter, he might reasonably turn pale […] blending, with an irreverent negligence, all that is most awfully true in religion with all that is most ridiculously absurd in superstition.'[102]

Coleridge, perhaps inadvertently, demonstrated the attraction of *The Monk* for the reading public; its excess of all that codifies the Gothic. For its many readers, the pleasure of the Gothic was analogous to that experienced by the audience of tragedy, the pleasure of terror experienced vicariously. This is connected to the emotional response to the sublime and depends upon a distance being maintained between fact and fiction. Burke said:

> When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are, delightful as we every day experience.[103]

The required distancing can be historical, social or religious, and allows the audience to maintain an illusion of heterogeneity which rests upon their awareness of fictionality.

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[101] Robert Miles, '1790s: The Effulgence of Gothic' in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction,* ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 53.
[102] S. T. Coleridge, Review of Lewis's *The Monk* (1797), in Norton, *Gothic Readings, The First Wave, 1764 – 1840* , p. 298.
[103]Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 1.vii., p. 36.

The Monk is set in an unfamiliar Catholic country which lets the audience enjoy the excesses of passion and lust because of the exoticism of the setting and characters. The following chapter will discuss further the way in which these mechanisms of the Gothic are comparable to those of tragedy in creating the distance between the observed and observer. Within these mechanisms, the Romantic sensibility will allow the tragic response of pity and sympathy to be developed for the unheroic villain, and Ambrosio the Monk to be recognised as a tragic hero.

Chapter Three

Identification of the tragic hero, the tragic elements of the Gothic novel, and the application of these to Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*

The previous chapter discussed how Renaissance Tragedy and Romantic Gothicism are products of the society in which they existed. The social uncertainty caused by the French Revolution is comparable to the unsettled times of the English Renaissance and Senecan Rome. In a similar manner as Senecan and Renaissance tragedies, the Romantic Gothic offered a safe place for emotion and violence to run unchecked. Societal turmoil, which presented society with challenges to political and religious beliefs, were reflected upon in the fictional worlds of the Gothic. By placing the events in a safely distant time, place, or belief system, the reader is able to experience the excesses of Gothic in an emotional safe space. In Gothic written for a Protestant readership, the Catholic Church can offer the unfamiliar worlds of the monastery and nunnery for the imaginary fictional excesses of debauchery and violence. Both the Renaissance humanist and the Romanticist look to extend the emotional response of the spectator. As the Renaissance theatre was a literary extension of the tragedy of Seneca, so the Gothic can be considered as a literary extension of the Romantic preoccupation with the self and emotion.

The excesses of Gothic and Senecan Tragedy come together in *The Monk*. In the Gothic, this introspection offers an engagement with characters operating at the absolute limits of the emotions. The reader is privy to the agonised self-reflections of the Gothic villain, in this case Ambrosio in *The Monk.* Fred Botting said: 'The sympathies for suffering, doomed individuals find expression in Romantic identification with Prometheus and Milton's Satan, regarded as heroes because of their resistance to

overpowering tyranny.'[104] It is this adjustment of the determination of heroism which is explored in the following discussion of Ambrosio. If the Gothic novel can be constructed within the framework of a tragedy, then the Gothic villain can now assume a tragic definition because of the sympathy extended to the individual by the Romantic sensibility. Botting and others have identified Milton's indomitable Satan as heroic: 'And courage never to submit or yield.'[105] This Romantic admiration and sympathy to the fallen permits a Gothic villain such as Ambrosio the Monk to be rediscovered as a tragic figure because his fall inspires our pity and fear.

To identify the hero, it is useful to first consider the words of Aristotle. Aristotle defined the tragic hero as**:** 'a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty (*hamartia*). He must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous.'[106] Ambrosio is a prince of the Church, 'All Madrid sings with his praises […] he is known through all the city by the name of the "Man of Holiness."'[107] His eminence is necessary because tragedy does not happen to ordinary people. The eminence of the tragic protagonist - classical heroes such as Hercules, Kings such as Lear, - create a distance between themselves and the audience. This distance is part of the safe-space which is necessary for the tragic to be enjoyed. Sir Philip Sydney said 'tragedy […] openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue, that maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants to manifest their tyrannical humours.'[108] Within this observation is an acknowledgement that because tragedy is a warning to all, there is

[104] Botting, *Gothic*, p. 92.
[105] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007), I, ll. 105 – 108.
[106] Aristotle, *Poetics*, p. 45.
[107] Matthew Lewis, *The Monk*, ed. Howard Anderson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 14. All further references will be given in the body of the text.
[108] Sir Philip Sidney, 'The Defense of Poesy', in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, *Vol. B*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: Norton, 2012), p. 1045.

therefore a connection established between all strata of society as they observe the tragic consequences. All react to the tragic according to their own level. The fictional experience of the tragic and the Gothic audience is a glimpse into a society beyond their own. Although sympathy will be shown to be essential to the tragic response, this social disparity can also produce a feeling of *schadenfreude*. The safe-space created by the fiction that allows the readier to observe, not only propitiates sympathy and fear, but also a complacency. There is enjoyment in the reassurance that no matter how bad our own experiences, they cannot be as bad as those of the Gothic.

In order to develop a sense of sympathy for the Gothic villain, it is useful to consider how the victim of tragedy can inspire sympathy when often it seems their actions are responsible for their downfall. Seneca's Hercules murders his children, but he is still regarded as a hero. George Steiner said: 'The tragic hero is responsible. His downfall is related to the presence in him of moral infirmity or active vice.'[109] Steiner argues here that tragedy is always the hero's fault; but Steiner is hypothesizing that post-rationalism, there can be no real tragedy because of the foregrounding of the intellect. This removes the cosmic and the acceptance that there are other powers at work. While Aristotle also admits the role of *hamartia* in the hero's fate, there is nevertheless a sense that tragedy is unavoidable. There is an understanding that Fate, (or post-Christian, Providence), is inescapable. Clifford Leech said: '[Tragedy is] an exposition of man's powerlessness in his cosmic setting.'[110] This reaffirms the classical understanding of tragedy; that irrespective of their actions, the tragic hero is a hostage to Fate. The doomed hero thus provokes pity irrespective of their actions.

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[109] Steiner, *Death of Tragedy*, p. 222.
[110] Leech, Tragedy, p. 16.

Aristotle recognised that the tragic hero is one who is both good and bad, because the: 'the spectacle of a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity: for this moves neither pity no fear; it merely shocks us.'[111] Conversely, 'Nor, again, should the downfall of the utter villain be exhibited […] it would inspire neither pity nor fear; for pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves.'[112] The reader can associate with flawed humanity; and can therefore respond to the same flaws that are identified within themselves. The Gothic can establish the same emotional connections as tragedy. Gregory A Staley said that: '[tragedy] reminds us that life is itself a stage on which we construct a sense of self by playing a part and that tragedy is the tale of parts played badly.'[113] In the same way as tragedy, the Gothic in its fictionality also shows the construction of a self because of the interiority of Romantic fiction. Ambrosio the Monk has literally been self-created as nothing is known of his origins: 'The late Superior of the Capuchins found him while yet an Infant at the Abbey-door' (p. 14). What this achieves is a sense of self as a construction which can be manipulated. Its fluidity is shown in the uncertainty and flux of the Monk's personality in times of crisis: 'His brain was bewildered, and presented a confusion Chaos of remorse, voluptuousness in quietude, and fear' (p. 174). This form of selfhood is identified by Gordon Braden with Senecan and Senecan-influenced Renaissance tragedy: '[…] the rage that is the all-consuming subject of Senecan tragedy seems to me the voice of a style of autarkic selfhood distinctly characteristic of classical civilization.'[114] This rage, or *Ira* identified in Senecan tragedy, can be identified in the Monk at times when his personality is closest to disintegration: 'He paced the chamber with disordered steps, howled with impotent fury, dashed himself

[111] Aristotle, *Poetics*, p. 45.
[112] Aristotle, *Poetics*, p. 45.
[113] Staley, *Seneca and the Idea of Tragedy*, p. 136.
[114] Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition*, p. 2.

violently against the walls, and indulged all the transports of rage and madness' (p. 204). This becomes a way of maintaining the self by means of the imposition of will and the manipulation of events. As previously discussed in Chapter One, this clinging to selfhood has antecedents in tragedy. Seneca's Medea and Webster's Duchess of Malfi assert their independence whether as protagonist or victim of the tragic event. As Ambrosio rages, so he maintains the fiction of a cogent personality and attempts to take control of his event.

Seneca warned of the destructive nature of anger:

> '[…] general destruction is the result when Fortune allows a man free scope for the promptings of his anger, and no power can endure for any length of time when the exercise of it means that many men must suffer.'[115]

For Seneca, the *hamartia* of anger is the prime means by which the tragic personage is brought to destruction. For Ambrosio, his loss of control to anger is coupled to that of his lust: 'Ambrosio again raged with desire; The die was thrown; His vows were already broken' (p. 173). Subsequently tormented by remorse: '[…] a secret impulse made him feel, how base and unmanly was the crime' (295), his personality faces disintegration as he oscillates between lust and guilt. The Monk's loss of control reveals the indeterminacy of the human condition which is analogous to the condition of the Gothic universe as it exists in a condition of confusion, illusion and disruption. Peter Garrett said that for the reader: 'the loss [of control] can become an object of desire, a thrill, a touch of the sublime.'[116] This new interpretation of the sublime is allied to the alternative morality of the sublime and the discovery of pleasure within fear discussed in Chapter Two. For the reader of the Gothic novel, all the excesses of fiction shown can offer enjoyment irrespective of their depravity.

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[115] Seneca, *Dialogues and Essays*, p. 32.
[116] Peter K. Garrett, *Gothic Reflections, Narrative Force in Nineteenth-Century Fiction (*Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 49.

The Gothic explores the Romantic sensibility, and this is shown in the re-assessment of the heroic ideal. As the Romantic writers re-engaged with Renaissance literature, it was a natural development that they would project their own sensibilities upon the dramatic texts they studied. Coleridge identified in *Hamlet*, something akin to a Romanticism of thought when he said: 'The effect of this overbalance of imagination is beautifully illustrated in the inward brooding of Hamlet; the effect of a superfluous activity of thought.'[117] This is an identification of the effect of a psychological uncertainty of self; a sense that the self is not fixed as the imagination runs un-checked. The anguished monologues of Hamlet in particular, allow an audience to witness the psychological disintegration of a personality exposed in its self-absorption and internal conflict. Hamlet himself identifies this when he says: 'Oh that this too, too sullied flesh would melt.'[118] He expresses here a craving for the indefinite, an expression of terminal confusion and a yearning to dissolve into indeterminacy. In this anguished interiority of the tragic hero, Hamlet is a precursor of the tortured hero of the Romantic.

Ambrosio the Monk possesses most of the qualities of the classical hero: beauty, strength, intelligence, charisma. The narrator describes him as: 'He was a Man of noble port and commanding presence. His stature was lofty, and his features uncommonly handsome' (p. 15). Like other tragic heroes such as Hamlet and Lear, Ambrosio gives monologues in which he struggles to construct himself with respect to morality and binary choices: 'He shuddered, when He beheld his arguments blazoned in their proper colours, and found that He had been a slave to flattery, to avarice, and self-love' (p. 53). In his flawed humanity, the reader can find a point of connection. Even within the excess of Gothic violence, there is an implied morality about Ambrosio. Ambrosio is

[117] Samuel Taylor Coleridge: 'Lectures on the Characteristics of Shakespeare' in Bate, *The Romantics on Shakespeare,* p. 135.
[118] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I. ii. 129.

not stimulated by his crimes; his immediate reactions are sympathetic to the victim: 'Amidst the horror and disgust to which his soul was a prey, pity for his Victim still held a place in it' (p. 297). He does not react in an intellectual fashion, but in a visceral, emotional manner. The recognition of the inadequacy of Ambrosio as well as his continued morality, allows a sympathetic response from the reader.

The reassessment by the Romantics of the binaries of hero and anti-hero has a correlation with the reassessment of morality by Diderot discussed in Chapter Two. This reconsideration of villainy and morality is implicit in the determination of the Romantic hero, and was discussed by William Hazlitt in respect of Milton's Satan. Hazlitt questioned the interpretation of Lucifer in *Paradise Lost* as the proto-villain when he wrote:

> When Milton says of Satan:
> 'His form had no yet lost
> All her original brightness, nor appear'd
> Less than archangel ruin'd, and th' excess
> Of glory obscur'd','
> the mixture of beauty, of grandeur, and pathos, from the sense of irreparable loss, of never-ending, unavailing regret is perfect.[119]

Hazlitt claims here that consciously or unconsciously, Milton is expressing an acknowledgment of the heroic nature of Lucifer as a tragic figure. Hazlitt was not alone in questioning and re-assessing the binaries of good and evil. William Blake suggested that perhaps Milton was: 'Of the Devil's party without knowing it.'[120] Milton is unconsciously displaying a glamorous side of Satan which the Romantics responded to. Satan as a defeated but undaunted figure is transfigured if endowed with an air of heroism. His claim that it is 'Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n,'[121] is one that

[119] William Hazlitt, 'On Shakespeare and Milton (1818)' in Bate, *The Romantics on Shakespeare*), p. 187.
[120] William Blake, 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', in *The Romantics on Milton*, ed. J Wittreich (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1970), p. 35.
[121] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007), I, l. 263.

would be recognised by the Romantic supporters of the French Revolution that had claimed equality and fraternity for all.

Satan displays an indomitable spirit and an urge for self-government which can be seen to be admirable. Richard Bradford said: ‘Milton in Book I invoked the heroic, cast Satan and his followers as tragic, defeated soldiers and at the same time reminded the Christian readers that it is dangerous to sympathise with these particular figures.’[122] If Bradford is correct, then the fact that a warning is necessary would seem to acknowledge the attraction this charismatic villain has for the Christian reader. This offers the suggestion that even this most villainous of villains can now be reassessed for heroic qualities. For Ambrosio the Monk, Lucifer’s end:

> Hurled headlong flaming from th’ethereal sky
> With hideous ruin and combustion down
> To bottomless perdition, there to dwell,[123]

mirrors his own in the imagery of a fall: ‘The Daemon continued to soar aloft, till reaching a dreadful height, He released the sufferer. Headlong fell the Monk through the airy waste’ (p. 338). Both are alike in pride, but it will be shown that while Lucifer is considered to be autonomous and responsible for his own fall, the Monk is the victim of outside forces.[124] The admiration, which is claimed for Satan by the Romantics, is ameliorated to sympathy and pity for Ambrosio. Ironically, it is Satan who engineers Ambrosio’s tragic journey. The Satanic figure in *The Monk* has lost the aura of heroism of Milton’s Lucifer and is now part of the forces which corrupt Ambrosio.

The catharsis of the audience produced by tragedy needs a means of distancing the audience to a safe distance in order to be effective. In a similar way, Gothic

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[122] Richard Bradford, *The Complete Critical Guide to John Milton* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 98.
[123] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, I. ll. 45 – 47.
[124] Pre-destination can be considered as a factor in the fall of Lucifer. However, overwhelmingly it is the autonomous Satan who inspires the Romantic admiration. As a sympathetic figure, Satan as victim is paralleled by Ambrosio.

literature offered a frisson of fear and a pleasurable thrill to the reader in an emotional safe space. To produce this safe space, the Gothic uses similar mechanisms as tragedy. Historical distancing plays a part in the tragedies of Shakespeare, and this can also be seen in the Gothic. From the very earliest Gothic novels, e.g. Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, part of the fictionalisation is to place the action in a distant time and faith. A vague historical, mediaeval setting operates in the same way for the authors of the Gothic as the vaguely defined historical settings of Webster, Shakespeare and Kyd. In *The Monk*, this is Catholic Spain, offering a setting distanced from the contemporary reader of the Gothic by both time and faith. This allows for an excess of Gothic locations, castles, monasteries, subterranean labyrinths, graveyards, sepulchre:

> The Castle which stood full in my sight, formed an object equally awful and picturesque. Its ponderous Walls […], its old and partly-ruined Towers […], its lofty battlements oer-grown with ivy […], made me sensible of a sad and reverential horror.' (p. 120)

This is now a recognised trope of the Gothic, but that does not lessen its importance to the genre. It is the unfamiliarity of the castles and monasteries which form the setting of *The Monk* which help establish the fictionality of the text. These settings are not only eerie, but also subliminal and are therefore important in the emotional response to the text.

Setting the novel in Catholic Spain, offers the opportunity to use the Catholic Church as a model of superstition and ignorance which can be observed by the Protestant readership as both a warning and a fascinating spectacle. For Lewis to position his villain with the figures of classical tragedy, the beneficent afterlife offered by the Catholic Church to the faithful must be removed. This is done by denying forgiveness. Because tragedy is final, because a tragic event ends in death, then it can be seen that a faith such as Christianity which offers a final redemption post-death diminishes tragedy. In Senecan tragedy, what afterlife there is, is shown in terms of

horror and despair as: 'eternal darkness.'[125] In the Senecan-influenced theatre of Renaissance tragedy, the afterlife can be denied because of the pagan nature of the protagonists, as for example in *Titus Andronicus*. Or, as in *Hamlet*, where a hegemony of Christianity is inferred, then the depravity of the villain is shown to lead to eternal damnation:

> A villain kills my father, and for that
> I, his sole son, do this same villain send
> To heaven.[126]

Hamlet delays his revenge upon Claudius as Claudius will receive divine absolution if he dies repenting. This is a Renaissance dramatist's manipulation of the Christian concepts of repentance and redemption in order to maintain the tragic unity. In *The Monk*, Christian redemption is denied by the actions of Ambrosio himself and by the duplicity of Satan: 'Here is your bond signed with your blood; You have given up your claim to mercy, and nothing can restore to you the rights which you have foolishly resigned' (p. 338). By this means, even though Ambrosio is a Christian, he can attain a tragic status because of his irrevocable damnation. Like Faustus, it is only through Ambrosio's willing compliance that he can be removed utterly from God's mercy. Ambrosio demonstrates the *hamartia* of the tragic hero defined by Aristotle, within the framework of Christian morality. For his Protestant readers, Lewis must maintain the core values of Christianity, while establishing the otherness of Catholicism.

More than 1,100 Gothic novels and chapbooks were published during the period 1780 – 1829, of which only a handful were pro-Catholic. [127] The overwhelming majority were virulently anti-Catholic. The first scene of *The Monk*, makes clear its suspicion of Catholicism:

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[125] Seneca, *Oedipus*, in *Six Tragedies*, p. 56, l. 591.
[126] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III. iii. ll. 76 – 79.
[127] For further information on Gothic publications, see Frederick S. Frank, *The First Gothics: A Critical Guide to the English Gothic Novel* (New York: Garland, 1987), p. xi.

> Do not encourage the idea that the Crowd was assembled wither from motives of piety or thirst of information. But very few were influenced by those reasons; and in a city where superstition reigns with such despotic sway as in Madrid, to seek for true devotion would be a fruitless attempt. (p. 7)

The association of Catholicism with superstition instead of devotion is a leitmotif of *The Monk*. Don Raymond says: '[…] I sighed while I reflected on the influence of superstition and weakness of human reason' (p. 119). It is difficult to escape irony here as Don Raymond will shortly find himself the victim of nightly visits by the ghostly Bleeding Nun. However, the conviction that Catholicism is superstitious and therefore primitive is clear in the novel. Diane Long Hoeveler, said: 'In Gothic literature, a reactionary, demonized and feudal Catholicism is created in order to stand in opposition to the modern Protestant individual […].'[128] There is the presentation of a religious anxiety, showing the ruins of Catholicism and the Catholic 'other'. Sociologically, the Catholics were a convenient scapegoat for contemporary social wrongs. Social unrest such as the Anti-Popery riots of 1779 , the Gordon Riots against increasing Catholic rights of 1780, and the Priestly riots of 1791 against the Catholic Relief Act,[129] demonstrated the fears of the Protestant populace. There was a drive of increasing secularisation throughout Europe from 1780 to 1880.[130] The Gothic offered a re-engagement with the Catholic belief system post-Enlightenment rationalisation. This fictionalisation of Catholicism as wrong and superstitious is an acknowledgment of the threat it still represented to the Protestant theism. The Gothic uses the Church as an empty show for the Protestant readers. Victor Sage said the Gothic is: 'a bundle of psychologically far-reaching popular prejudices which reinforced the theological

[128] Diane Long Hoeveler, *The Gothic Ideology* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014), p. 3.
[129] For a discussion of the sociological, theological and political concerns behind British anti-Catholicism, see Colin Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England c. 1714 – 80: A Political and Social Study* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).
[130] for more on this see Diane Long Hoeveler, *Gothic Riffs: Secularizing the Uncanny in the European Imaginary; 1780 to 1820* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010).

identity of different parts of his readership.'[131] The distancing this anti-Catholicism produces for the readership, and which produces the tragic response and catharsis, is almost incidental to the sociological importance of uniting the Protestant identity of the readership.

David Stevens said: '[…] there is the clear suggestion that the gothic emanates from a period of spiritual transition and dramatic change in religious outlook.'[132] In the Gothic, this loss of spirituality, and the fear of the new, scientific world is combated by a reaffirmation of the binaries of good and evil, light and dark. Religion of the right sort, Protestantism, is acknowledged. This 'spiritual transition' is taken as a freedom to express blasphemous views and permit attack upon the established Church. For the contemporary readers of *The Monk*, its most shocking element was not the sexual violence but its blasphemous attack on the bible: 'Every thing is called plainly and roundly by its name; and the annals of a Brothel would scarcely furnish a greater choice of indecent expressions' (p. 199). The fact that these attacks are displaced upon the foreign and the Catholic, is symptomatic of a need to purge the established faith of all that is wrong. The association of the Catholic Church with credulous superstition, idolatry and the unnatural life of the monk and nun created a clear difference between the Protestant reader and the mediaeval practices described. The Catholic religion is shown to be rooted in superstition: 'He [Lorenzo] blushed to see his Countrymen the Dupes of deceptions so ridiculous' (p. 266). It is therefore as fictional and irrelevant as pagan pantheism to the implied Anglican reader. As the Gothic reflects sociological anxieties, its fictionality allows these anxieties to be expressed and explored. The

[131] Victor Sage, *Horror Fiction in the Protestant Tradition* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. xiv.
[132] David Stevens, *The Gothic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 8.

Gothic villain, like the tragic hero, must exist in a fictional space for the reader, but there must be a recognition between the fictional and the actual.

The fascination of the Gothic for the religious life is codified by Diane Long Hoeveler as part of the generic Gothic ideology, '[…] a reification and representation of the hystericized nun, the murderous and shape-shifting monk, the ominous Inquisition scenario and the haunted ruined abbey.'[133] The religious life represented a threat to the Protestant norm as an alternative society beyond the control of reason and law. The threat of the foreign Inquisition and the horrors of the auto-da-fe, presented a legalised torture which for many came to symbolise all that was diabolical about Catholicism and to represent a legitimatisation of the fear of the foreign 'other'. In *The Monk*, this can be used by those in authority for their own reasons: 'I flattered myself with the idea that my Uncle's credit at the Court of Rome would remove this obstacle' (p. 140). Raymond assumes that his uncle, the Cardinal-Duke of Lerma, can gain a release of Agnes from her holy vows. This is a demonstration of a hegemony of corruption and preference which explains how the Catholic Church provides a framework within which the Monk can operate almost unchallenged. While looking for a sympathetic response to Ambrosio, it can be argued that he is also a victim of his faith because the corrupt Catholic Church allows him opportunities to sin which outweigh his moral strength.

The appropriation of the figure of a licentious and diabolical monk is common in the Gothic novel.[134] It represents a socially uncomfortable 'other' for the English Protestant, and is therefore a personification of the alleged turpitude of Catholicism. There is an association of Renaissance Drama with Gothic anti-Catholicism. The influence of Shakespeare in *The Monk* has been identified by David Salter:

[133] Long-Hoeveler, *The Gothic Ideology*, p. 19.
[134] See Long-Hoeveler, *The Gothic Ideology*, 'Appendix', p. 328 to 334 for a list of titles associated with monks or priests, an overwhelming majority of which are dangerous or duplicitous.

'Shakespeare is deployed in the Gothic novel to authorise, legitimize and even shore up that sense of Englishness that defines itself not simply as Protestant, but as virulently anti-Catholic in character.'[135] The connection of Shakespeare to anti-Catholicism legitimises the anti-Catholicism hysteria of terrorist Gothic The opening epigraph of Chapter One of the novel is taken from *Measure for Measure*:

> Lord Angelo is precise;
> Stands at a guard with envy; Scarce confesses
> That his blood flows, or that his appetite
> Is more to bread than stone.[136]

This parallels Lord Angelo's lust for the nun Isabella with Ambrosio's lust for Antonia. This establishes Shakespearean precedence and an affiliation with esteemed literature. The appropriation of the duplicitous and amoral religious figure by Lewis is seen to be part of a literary heritage from the Reformation onwards. The significance of this suspicion of the Catholic Church to the Gothic genre is discussed by Kiely in a critique of *The Castle of Otranto*:

> For the eighteenth-century English Protestant, the trappings of the Roman Church provided an exotic background, but, more than that, they were symbols of superstition, fanaticism, and odd behaviour. Thomas Aquinas notwithstanding, the majority of Walpole's readers would have taken it for granted that where Catholicism reigned, reason was deposed.[137]

Thus for the Protestant reader, Catholicism can be seen as a metonym for unreason and madness. The setting of *The Monk* in a Catholic faith establishes a fictional universe of irrationality and indeterminacy. The reader exists beyond this universe as an observer witnessing and experiencing the emotional range from a foundation of reason.

Having established the distancing that the tragic Gothic must construct between itself and its readers to provide a cathartic response, the events of *The Monk* can now be

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[135] David Salter, '"This Demon in the Garb of a Monk": Shakespeare, the Gothic and the Discourse of Anti-Catholicism' *Shakespeare*, 5, pp. 52 – 67.
[136] William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. J. W. Lever (London: Arden, 2006), I. iv.50 – 53.
[137] Kiely, *The Romantic Novel in England*, p. 31.

interpreted as tragic components. Ambrosio's crimes - murder, rape and incest - are considered as examples of *scelus*, the awesome crime. Robert Miola said: 'Seneca showed Renaissance writers including Shakespeare how to make *scelus* the central principle of tragic action and design, how to focus on the crime, the perpetrators, the victims and on the moral framework violated.'[138] In the tragedies of Shakespeare, the violent outrages revealed their Senecan antecedents. In Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, the revenge sought by Titus for his daughter's Lavinia's rape and mutilation forms the action of the play. His anguish is experienced by the audience who share his thoughts: 'My grief was at the height before thou cam'st,/ And now like Nilus it disdaineth bounds.'[139] His subsequent violence and *scelus* are thus justified to the audience and a sympathetic bond is formed. In *The Monk,* there is a similar excess of blood and violence in the *scelus* of rape, incest and murder perpetrated by Ambrosio which form the source of the novel. Like Titus, the *scelus* is explored from the perspective of the perpetrator, but the justification is less clear. Ambrosio's fall is closely aligned to that of the classical tragic as it is his *hamartia* of pride which leads him into the tragic state, not a need for vengeance. The sympathy therefore needed to extend to the tragic hero depends upon the recognition of Ambrosio's psychological vulnerability. As his reason wavers due to his lack of emotive control: '[…] his lust was become madness' (p. 292), there is an opportunity to explore this vulnerability in terms of his human weakness. As Ambrosio follows a trajectory of violence, so he demonstrates his contradictory psychological states. Sympathy and pity are provoked by the reader's admission of their awareness of similar, if less murderous, psychological indeterminism.

[138] Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy*, p. 16.
[139] Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, 3.1.71 - 72.

In order to be reassessed as a figure of tragedy Ambrosio the Monk must engage the sympathy of the readers. To do this, it is necessary to acknowledge any ameliorating circumstances for what appears to be his autonomous criminality. If *The Monk* is established as a work of tragedy, then it can be recognised that there are certain tragic implications. The 'cosmic forces' mentioned earlier mean that there is a sense of inescapability for Ambrosio. Clifford Leech said: 'In almost every tragedy, the atmosphere is one of doom from the beginning […].'[140] That is, there is a sense that this is inevitable, that what happens is beyond human control. Ambrosio is revealed to be the target of the implacable hatred of Satan himself 'Know, vain Man! That I long have marked you for my prey' (p. 337). There is an irony here as that in contrast to the established anti-superstition of the novel, Ambrosio is destroyed by the supernatural made corporeal. First in the form of Rosario/Matilda, and then by Satan in person. As often in tragedy, the tragic consequences can seem in excess of the transgression. To have aroused such enmity, seems inappropriate, unless it is considered the Ambrosio exhibits the *hamartia* of pride: 'He looked round him with exultation, and Pride told him loudly, that He was superior to the rest of his fellow-Creatures' (p. 32). His pride in his virtue is considered a weakness in classical terms in the same way as that of Hippolytus in Seneca's *Phaedra*. Hippolytus is torn apart after refusing Phaedra's sexual advances, but it his over-weening pride in his virtue: 'But Woman is the root of all evil. Full of her wicked schemes, / she lays siege to men's minds,'[141] that is his downfall. Hippolytus and Ambrosio share excessively gruesome ends:

> Hippolytus bloodied the countryside: his shattered skull
> Bounced down the rocks, and thorns tore off his hair:
> His beautiful face was ruined by the hard, stone ground.[142]

[140] Leech, *Tragedy*, p. 39.
[141] Seneca, *Phaedra*, p. 18, ll. 558 – 559.
[142] Seneca, *Phaedra*, p. 33, ll. 1093 – 1095.

Ambrosio is dropped onto rocks by Satan and there left to suffer: 'Eagles of the rock tore his flesh piecemeal, and dug out his eye-balls with their crooked beaks' (p. 339). Although Ambrosio may seem to be more deserving of suffering because of his actions, as figures of tragedy, both may be considered victims of women.

The Monk is a novel driven by the sexual urge, and Christopher MacLachlan is correct when he said that: 'All the characters are driven by sexual desire.'[143] The female characters are as sexually active as the male. Maggie Kilgour identified the Gothic gender norm as: 'An aggressive sexual male, who wants to indulge his own will set against a passive spiritual female, who is identified with the restrictions of social norms.'[144] In *The Monk* this is subverted as the women are monstrous or sexual. Even the virginal Antonia expresses lustful feelings: 'A pleasurable fluttering in her bosom which till then had been unknown to her' (p. 15). This acknowledgment of the sexually autonomous female is an uncomfortable one. Ambrosio's Senecan antecedent, Hippolytus, feared the sexual urges consequent of exposure to women: 'Passion slips inside our very bones, / laying waste our veins with hidden fire.'[145] Similarly, Ambrosio fears exposure to women and looks to blame others for his downfall: 'You [Matilda] who first seduced me to violate my vows; You, who first roused my sleeping vices' (p. 207). There is therefore some evidence for considering Ambrosio as a victim of the sexually predatory woman. For Lewis's readers, the Spanish Catholic setting allows the fiction that foreign women are voracious: 'The climate's heart, tis well known, operates with no small influence upon the constitutions of the Spanish Ladies' (p. 184). Ambrosio's integrity can be considered to be under greater than normal sexual temptation because of the heightened licentiousness of the Spanish Ladies. The

[143] Christopher MacLachlan, 'Introduction', Matthew Lewis, *The Monk*, ed. Christopher MacLachlan (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p. xv.
[144] Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, p. 12.
[145] Seneca, *Phaedra*, p. 10, ll. 278 – 280.

fictionality of the text allows the assertion that because foreign women behave like this then sexual temptation alleviates some of the blame from Ambrosio for his transgressions.

There is a sense of fear about the sexually active female. Markman Ellis said that this is meant to represent to the reader the consequences of allowing women autonomy: 'The strong, even monstrous figure Matilda becomes is reminiscent of misogynist constructions of femininity.'[146] This fear of the strong woman is shown by Ambrosio when Matilda assumes control: 'Now She assumed a sort of courage and manliness in her manners and discourse […] She spoke no longer to insinuate, but to command, (p. 178). The allegation is that Ambrosio is being led astray by the unnatural woman. (Of course, Matilda is not a woman but a demon of indeterminate sex.) The misogynist fear of the strong woman is further displayed by the example of The Bleeding Nun who demonstrates powerfully for the reader the awful fate that awaits the self-determining woman:

> It was the Bleeding Nun! […] I beheld before me an animated Corse [sic]. Her countenance was long and haggard; Her cheeks and lips were bloodless; The paleness of death was spread over her features, and her eye-balls fixed steadfastly upon me were lustreless and hollow. (p. 124)

Here, the autonomous woman is punished even beyond the grave. Our sympathy is engaged for Ambrosio as he is adrift in a world of fluid determinates. Robert Kiely said: 'Where is a hero, a man in control of his own power, in a world of mannish women, effeminate men, servile masters, commanding slaves, where the dead often seem more animated than the impotent, rigid, terrified living?'[147] The binary constructs of heroism and villainy are reduced in a world of reversed normalities.

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[146] Markman Ellis, *The History of Gothic Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 87.
[147] Kiely, *The Romantic Novel in England*, p. 116.

Hazlitt remarked of King Lear: ‘It is his rash haste, his violent impetuosity, his blindness to everything but the dictates of his passions or affections, that produces all his misfortunes, that aggravates his impatience of them, that enforces our pity for him.’[148] Our pity is engaged because of the recognition of the underlying humanity of Lear in spite of his fictionality. Ambrosio displays a similar pattern of irrationality and lack of control. The Catholic Church has been instrumental in the formation of Ambrosio’s psychological character. He has been formed in what his guardians’ have believed is the purest form of the Catholic man ‘His instructors carefully repressed those virtues, whose grandeur and disinterestedness were ill-suited to the Cloister’ (p. 182). As the novel is considered as an anti-Catholic polemic, then perhaps Ambrosio is to be pitied as the product of a corrupt system. He has been twisted from an early age to produce a character which is vulnerable to corruption: ‘While the Monks were busied in rooting out his virtues, and narrowing his sentiments, they allowed every vice […] to arrive at full perfection’ (p. 182). This awareness of damage and vulnerability makes Ambrosio recognisably human and to be pitied. The damage inflicted upon his character leaves him vulnerable to the personalised attack by Satan.

An early review of *The Monk* recognised that it is Ambrosio’s *hamartia* of pride which is ultimately responsible for his downfall:

> The monk, in fact, inspires sympathy, because soiled by more than mortal weapons; yet nothing was done by Matilda, which could not have been achieved by female wiles – the monk’s pride was the arch devil that betrayed him.[149]

Like Hippolytus, Ambrosio’s pride in his purity left him vulnerable to downfall and to claim our pity and sympathy. As the Renaissance became a means of rediscovery of the awareness of self, so the Romantic movement offered a similar rediscovery of

[148] William Hazlitt, From *Characters* and *London Magazine*, June 1820, in Bate, *The Romantics on Shakespeare,* p. 395.
[149] *The Analytical Review*, XXIV, (October 1796).

interiority. Identifying Ambrosio with the figures of tragedy because of Romantic sensibility means the reader can extend their pity and sympathy. Whether because of the machinations of others, a victim of cosmic forces, or as a damaged man of other's determination, Ambrosio the Monk can now assume a tragic definition because of the sympathy extended to the flawed individual by the Romantic sensibility.

Conclusion

In an early review of *The Monk*, the proto-feminist Mary Wollstonecraft said:

> The whole temptation [of Ambrosio] is so artfully contrived, that a man, it should seem, were he made as other men are, would deserve to be d-ned who could resist even devilish spell, conducted with such address, and assuming such a heavenly form.[150]

She acknowledges that there is an inevitability to Ambrosio's fall because of the form of the temptation projected on him. This temptation is personalised to the peculiar weakness of Ambrosio - sexual inexperience and uncontrollable lust. *The Monk* has been identified by Kilgour and others as an anti-feminist and misogynistic text in its portrayal of the monstrous feminine. It is therefore significant that Wollstonecraft cannot deny that Ambrosio is a victim deserving of even a feminist's sympathy. This acknowledgement of the vulnerability to temptation of even the strongest of us, is further proof of the shared human experience by which the reader discovers sympathy for Ambrosio's fall. Clifford Leech recognised that: 'He [the tragic hero] is not necessarily virtuous, not necessarily free from profound guilt. What he is is a man who reminds us strongly of our own humanity, who can be accepted as standing for us.'[151] The association of humanity is necessary if the spectacle of tragedy is to provoke a response from its audience. Epictetus argued that among the literary forms tragedy is the best suited to arguing against the passions; 'For what else are tragedies but the sufferings of human beings who have been wonderstruck by external things […].'[152] The reader of *The Monk* experiences the tragic response of catharsis because of the shared humanity with the tragic hero. There is a connection of sympathy leading to a

[150] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Analytical Review*, 42 (1796), p. 403.
[151] Clifford Leech, *Tragedy* (London: Methuen and Co., 1969), p. 46.
[152] Epictetus, *Discourses,* 1.4.26, quoted in Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 444.

cathartic response, whether this is of warning against emotional excess, or a subliminal enjoyment of the immoral.

The claims of the vulnerability of the Gothic villain would not be possible without the return to a pre-Enlightenment sensibility and an acknowledgment of the primacy of the self. The proofs offered in this dissertation of Gothic heroism can only be possible if the if reading is focusesd upon this egocentrism. As the Romantics re-engaged with the power of the imagination and the emotions, so the Modernism movement of the early twentieth century represented a return of the self in literature after the empiricism and scientific excitement of the Victorian era. As a product of this literary heritage, a modern reader can therefore readily engage with the Romantic sensibility because of the contemporary awareness and centralisation of the emotional individual. Modern Gothic writing shows how the Gothic villain can now considered as a victim of tragedy. The hugely popular *Twilight* series by Stephenie Meyer is an example of a modern romantic sensibility applied to a figure traditionally associated with fear and violence. The vampire Edward Cullen is portrayed as a romantic, Byronic figure. There is scope to re-read Stoker's Dracula and other Gothic villains such as Maturin's Melmoth as similar figures of sympathy. Every vampire is a victim, and the eternally damned appeal to our pity.

The enduring popularity and importance of Gothic fiction has been discussed by many critics including Hogle:

> [Gothic's] symbolic mechanisms, particularly its haunting and frightening spectres, have permitted us to cast many anomalies in our modern conditions, even as these change, over onto antiquated or at least haunted spaces and highly anomalous creatures. This way our contradictions can be confronted by, yet removed from us into, the seemingly unreal, the alien, the ancient, and the grotesque.'[153]

[153] Hogle, *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, p. 6.

Thereby even as Gothic can often represent the return of the past to haunt the present, so for the reader the present can be revaluated in the past. Thus, modern anxieties and insecurities can be explored in the safer confines of the fictional in the same manner as Romantic anxieties of faith could be displaced to Catholic Spain. Shakespeare could explore social upheaval in his tragedies set in classical times, and Seneca show the consequences of ungoverned emotional excess in his poems set beyond the murderous Roman court. The popularity of modern Gothic show how there is still a need for a fiction of distance and escapism.

In conclusion, by fulfilling the tents of the Poetics of Aristotle and through the extension of Romantic sensibility, both Senecan tragedy and the Romantic Gothicism of Matthew Lewis offer the reader/spectator catharsis because of their distancing from reality. The protagonists of both are characters who fall from a position of eminence. Ambrosio the Monk, like the figures of classicism is destroyed totally by an amalgamation of his own actions, the effect of Fate or providence, and the machinations of others. The *hamartia* of pride, and the emotional excess of lust and anger, lead to a destruction that is carried beyond death and from which there is no possibility of redemption. Like Hercules, Thyestes and Hippolytus, Ambrosio is a figure of tragedy worthy of our pity and sympathy.

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