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Prisoners in Romance:
Patterns of Entrapment in Romantic Fiction

by

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Abstract

"Prisoners in Romance" examines three subversive, inconclusive, and self-deconstructing Romantic novels: Matthew Gregory Lewis's The Monk, William Godwin's Caleb Williams, and Charles Robert Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer. Each of these novels uses complex patterns of initiation into self-consciousness, into self-expression, and into the despairing consciousness that ensues, to portray social, psychological and aesthetic entrapment.

Chapter one focusses on The Monk and examines the consequences of social repression. The repression of sexual and creative energies results in uncontrollable, violent forms of self-expression, including rape, murder, and, in Lewis's case, the use of lurid images and sensational situations in his fiction. Although sexual and creative passions are released in such outbursts, these outbursts do not free people from restriction; instead people become imprisoned in their obsessiveness, their guilt, or their knowledge. Confessional narratives appear to absolve characters of their guilt, but Lewis subverts that appearance and reminds his reader that no escape, no

absolution is possible.

Chapter two examines Caleb Williams and its prisons of solipsism. The increasing dominance of the narrator's inner self over his outer self yields a psychological novel in which all that once seemed clear gradually becomes blurred. Godwin uses a first-person narrator to reduce the distance between the narrative and the reader; as a result, the reader accompanies Caleb on his journey into madness and dissolution. The text crumbles as Caleb goes mad, leaving the reader trapped in an unstable fiction.

Chapter three considers Melmoth the Wanderer's prisons of form and language. Maturin shares his nonconforming characters' view that appearances veil reality and that language is divisive, restrictive and inadequate for communicating profound feeling. To overcome the limitations of the present, he recentres the absent, but only discovers that he is unable to escape the need for and the imprisonment associated with forms.

All three novels leave the reader with a sense that characters, readers and writers are all victims of their own attempts to reach beyond given truths and of their attempts to communicate those truths effectively. No escape from this inconclusiveness appears possible. In denying their own authority, Lewis, Maturin and Godwin also deny the authority of any single interpretation.

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Introduction

In discussing The Monk, Caleb Williams, and Melmoth the Wanderer as romance-fantasies, I have consciously rejected the more frequent categorization applied to these novels--that of Gothic; my choice of other terms therefore demands a brief explanation. Robert Hume argues that novels such as these must be referred to as "Horror-Gothic" rather than as romance because although they confront the same problems that romances do, they arrive at different conclusions; using Goleridge's terms, he claims that "Gothic writers are working with fancy, which is bound to the 'fixities and definites' of the rational world", whereas "Romance" is related to imagination and the discovery of "high truth" (289). I must disagree with his distinctions, primarily on the basis of his reading of Coleridge. For according to Coleridge, the secondary imagination "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events struggles to idealize and to unify" (Biographia Literaria 313); it may "seek clarity and truth in a world of permanence" [emphasis mine](Hume 289), but does not necessarily have to find it. Furthermore, dissolution as a means toward re-creation is far from

limited to writing that discovers a unifying "high truth". While these novels do not meet Hume's requirements of transcending the difficulties they confront,[1] they do meet Coleridge's description of imagination. But I reject Hume's distinctions mainly because they do not clearly address the issues with which I am concerned.

The approach that I adopt in this study is best met by the definitions of romance and fantasy proffered by Robert Kiely and Rosemary Jackson respectively. Kiely states that in romance one finds "moral and psychological ambivalence culminating all too often in a disaster which is of the story as well as in it" (2). Such novels, he says, adopt the "subjective vision . . . as the crucial event" (21) and "thrive like parasites on structures whose ruin is the source of their life" (2). Jackson focuses on the "instability of narrative" (34), "a reluctance, or an inability, to present definitive versions of 'truth' or 'reality'" (37), the introduction of confusion and alternatives to a unitary vision (35), and the inversion of conventional romance structures (101) in her description of the fantastic. Both critics imply that instability, subversion, and a sense of insurmountable inadequacy of expression lie at the root of romance and fantasy.

In his introduction to Melmoth, William Axton not only

comments on the origins of this literature, but also mentions some of its underlying characteristics:

> The figurative texture of the Gothic novel is a projection of the romantic mind's sense of entrapment in an antiquated culture, its struggle to break from it, and its guilty consciousness of both its participation in obsolete attitudes and its transgressions against traditional standards. (xi)

For caught between a desire for change and the necessity of communicating with conventional tools, writers of romance simultaneously and necessarily rebel against and utilize numerous literary conventions. The psychological issues that they confront include both "projection" and "guilt". Kiely notes that "at its very foundations, the English novel was a social genre, not taking its earliest inspirations from fear of God or love of nature, but from a preoccupation with the structure of society" (21). Such fiction depicts characters who are dissatisfied with their lives learning to adapt and conform to society. Romantic fiction adopts a different view, concentrating on the individual rather than society, on subjective, psychological experience rather than objective, social experience. In doing so, it concentrates on inner journeys

into fantasies, dreams, despair and madness. Crossing the boundary between conventional or social fiction and unconventional psychological fiction, these authors are forced to explore and challenge issues that those writing conventional novels, based on objective experience and rational explanations, either were not aware of or chose to disregard.

The reasons for my choice of novels and the order in which I discuss them also require some explanation. Why not, for example, consider one of Ann Radcliffe's novels since she is commonly regarded as the greatest Gothic writer and does explore psychological experience? While she may have been extremely influential, Radcliffe, like Clara Reeve, was able to peek only momentarily at the dark side of life: in her novels certainty is always restored, logical explanations found, and anxiety dissipated as that dark side is removed to the margins. Although all romances of the type I have described deal with social repression and power struggles, those I have decided to consider also examine the psychological and aesthetic entrapment in uncertain, amoral, pessimistic landscapes; they face unflinchingly not just the gloom but also the absences and instability without trying to explain them. They recognize, yet do not assume the authority to fill absences

in the narrative; they are conscious that the imprisonment they describe is inescapable. Lewis, Godwin and Maturin show "considerable psychological shrewdness" (Tysdahl 70) and demonstrate a willingness to confront without trying to diminish the uncertainty, confusion, and frustration of life and the inevitability of death. Further, they apply this pessimistic view to the creative act and thereby suggest that because writers cannot escape language, no effective means of self-expression is possible.

Lewis's, Godwin's and Maturin's novels, published between 1794 and 1820, cover a period of romanticism in which various forms of repression were openly challenged. Although Caleb Williams appeared before The Monk, I have chosen to consider the later novel first. For I have tried to discuss the works in order of increasing self-consciousness and sophistication. Lewis's portrayal of psychological states is occasionally superseded by his interest in depicting lurid physical details, and his self-consciousness manifests itself less obviously. All three novels share similar underlying concerns, despite taking apparently different forms. Rebelling against religious authority, Lewis's characters struggle with sexual desires; Godwin's central character seems to battle against social injustice, but his struggle also has a theological

undertone as he flees from the consequences of his thirst for knowledge; Maturin's characters deal with the prisons of custom and despairing consciousness. In all three novels, the authors reveal concerns about imprisonment within the self, solipsism, identity, self-consciousness, isolation, alienation, the nature and consequences of transgression, life and death, stasis and change, process and product, and their relationship not only to aesthetics generally, but to the novel in particular.

In varying ways, these novels all explore degrees of entrapment in social, psychological and linguistic prisons within a complex framework of developing consciousness, of transgression, and of alienation. These novels are structured like a series of concentric circles, or containers within containers. Characters tend to begin at what they perceive to be a center and try to work their way out, only to find that the circumference towards which they are striving constitutes the centre of another enclosure. Apparent movement outwards is actually a regressive downward and inward spiral into increased solitude. Figures such as Cain, Faust, Prometheus, Shelley's Frankenstein, Milton's Satan, Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, and Byron's Manfred can frequently be related to the situations that characters experience in the five stages of

increasing consciousness, each of which carries numerous implications.

In the first stage, that of identity, characters accept hierarchical power relationships as undisputed givens. Their conforming, submissive behaviour purchases a social identity and membership within society.[2] Power lies in the hands of those who can impose their version, which tends to be a partial version, of the truth about the nature of existence, onto the rest of society. I will refer to this imposition of a particular point of view as "story". Unquestioning acceptance of the authority of the imposed story is assumed to be universal. This implies that the story's recipient makes no moral choices and participates neither in the creation nor in the discovery of that story. Subjective and objective experience, fantasy and reality, belief and truth are united. Hence, inner and outer selves reflect one another and are one. In this state, characters perceive their position at the centre as one of security. In an aesthetic context, this category would include poets and authors who follow all literary conventions, particularly those who attempt to imitate classical models.

Without realizing it, however, these characters and authors appear to be prisoners of custom and superstition,

for according to Sir Francis Bacon, "[t]here is a superstition in avoiding superstition, when men think to do best if they go furthest from the superstition formerly received . . . " (90). Significantly, as Maturin notes, both those wielding social power and those subjected to it can be locked in this stultifying prison of custom. In a social system, education tends to involve the imposition of a certain ideology and frequently, especially in The Monk, the infusion of superstition and its correlative, fear. Those giving this education attempt to preserve intact their subjects' passivity and innocence. They hope to keep these subjects devoid of personal experience and therefore without a past, without a history, and without an identity beyond that imposed upon them. Unless characters develop an awareness of possibilities beyond their protected existences and of their subjection to the passage of time, they remain atemporal and, in a sense, unreal. Such characters appear like statues: preserved, timeless, changeless.

At a certain point, however, this sanctuary may be perceptually transformed into a prison. Characters perceive inconsistencies and gaps in the dictated "story" and embark on a Faustian quest to fill such gaps; in doing so, they inwardly challenge the authority behind the story.

This is also what the authors of these novels encourage the reader to do. As a result of such questioning, previously unified concepts and selves are separated and appear not as reflections of but as opposites to one another. The correlation between appearance and reality, for example, breaks down. This recognition of differences marks the entrance into self-consciousness and the fragmentation of the self. Frankenstein's creature reaches this point by reading: "The words induced me to turn towards myself" (114);

> As I read, however, I applied much personally to my own feelings and condition. I found myself similar yet at the same time strangely unlike to the beings concerning whom I read and to whose conversation I was a listener.
>
> (123)

Psychologically, the subject and object separate and the split selves exist side by side; no longer does their inner conception of self, what Godwin calls "character" in Caleb Williams, correlate with the social identity, or "reputation," that a person has been given.

This questioning marks the beginning of a dangerous quest for forbidden sexual, metaphysical or scientific knowledge; mild questioning changes into an insatiable

desire to hear a tale beneath that which the character has been given. In Mary Shelley's novel, Frankenstein obsessively pursues the secret of life; his creature embarks on a quest to find and confront his creator. This compulsive questing can be viewed as a process of discovery in which the obsession bonds the questing self to his object; the subject acknowledges the distinction between himself and his creation but feels bound to it by his need to understand it. As Maturin suggests, this urge to listen to a story can prove dangerous if it becomes obsessive and if that urge is fulfilled, for the attainment of knowledge initiates a listener into time, change and life, but it also initiates him into dissolution and death. Both listening and telling are accompanied by fear:

> Monçada and Melmoth drew their chairs closer to the fire, looking at each other with the aspect of men who wish to inspire each other with courage to listen, and to tell, and are more eager to inspire it, because neither feels it himself.
>
> (406)

The moment at which perception of a benevolent world is transformed into perception of a tyrannical one is the moment at which characters begin to feel isolated and

imprisoned within their societies. Authority previously perceived as benevolent suddenly appears oppressive and arbitrary. As far as the world is concerned, these people still belong in their social positions; however they no longer feel a sense of belonging because their view of the world no longer corresponds to the norm. In this isolated state, the social self remains dominant, acknowledging the inner self only in private moments and restraining it at others. The imagination is released in those private moments and gradually gains influence over the social self. The tension between the inner imaginative self and the social self grows until the inner self is released and transformed in a moment of self-expression.

The anticipatory tension of the quest builds until the restrained inner self takes control over the outer self and expresses itself in the objective world through action. This represents the point at which the questing character finally hears the "true story", or, through experience, discovers the missing knowledge; it is, in more than Ambrosio's case, the consummation of an obsession. This instant of self-expression involves active participation in one's destiny and requires personal choices and responses. Suddenly the process becomes a product and subject and object separate just as a poet and his completed poem

become distinct upon completion and publication of the poem. No longer is the difference between inner and outer selves or between the subject and the object of his pursuit simply a perceptual difference; instead, it becomes actual, alienating and dangerous. In performing a transgressive action, a character tries to escape from incarceration into liberty, but discovers instead that his perceived prison cell has become a real one; repeated attempts merely send him into deeper incarceration.

Having suddenly shifted his position from that of a timeless, changeless, passive recipient to that of an active asocial individual, a character suffers exile, loss of social identity, imprisonment, and sometimes death. The rise of and imprisonment within the newly dominant inner self accompanies various kinds of social castigation. For at the moment of action, two changes occur: the inner self destroys the social self and attains a position of dominance and, upon public discovery, the individual's isolation within society changes into alienation from society; gradually such alienation forces a character further into himself.

Berdyaev's claim that "[i]n the objectivized world man can be only relatively not absolutely free" (131) applies to those who objectify their inner passions through action.

For as passion destroys reason, occasional dreams occurring only in solitude are transformed into perpetual, real nightmares. The rising dominance of the inner self and its objective expression signify the imprisonment within the personal self, and create what prove to be perhaps the most inescapable prisons of solipsism--guilt, and that consciousness of knowing the "true story" without being able to communicate it which leads to madness and despair. Eventually some characters lose their ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality; their inner fantasies are projected onto the environment and inner and outer experience blurs.

Action as a transgressory expression is effective in completely and finally removing characters from their previous innocent existence. Once characters begin to move from innocence through stages of awareness and experience, they find themselves compelled to continue forging their way through a tyrannical, terrifying world of uncertainty, a world in which boundaries blur and everything is constantly transformed into its opposite. Although the original sense of certainty and safety within boundaries determined by authority might now appear desirable, it is no longer attainable. Characters discover that their actions are irreversible and that the consciousness into

which these actions have initiated them is inescapable:

> Of what a strange nature is knowledge! It clings to the mind when it has once seized on it like a lichen on the rock. I wished sometimes to shake off all thought and feeling, but I learned that there was but one means to overcome the sensation of pain, and that was death. . . .
>
> (Frankenstein 115)

Every attempt to escape confinement plunges characters into more binding and alienating forms of imprisonment in exile from society and in the depths of the self. Extreme rebellion through action is succeeded by extreme punishment.

These novels reflect the Kantian perspective which, Kiely says, "confronts man with himself, a creature limited by his senses yet capable of imagining the limitless" (16); for they constantly reiterate the theme of entrapment in which men are stuck within their consciousness yet without the power to escape through the exercise of consciousness. There is an underlying awareness that no act of the will can affect the course of one's destiny even if one learns what that destiny is. An individually directed action tends to be transgressive because it challenges social stability in a number of ways, not the least of which is

the realization that the authoritarian base upon which a society rests is illusive. Upon discovery, the destruction of the social self manifests itself physically in a character's alienation from society:

> Alone, alone, all, all alone,
> Alone on a wide wide sea!
> And never a saint took pity on
> My soul in agony.
>
> ("Rime of the Ancient Mariner" 232-35)

Just as a physical enclosure may be either a prison or a sanctuary, the identity given by social authorities is both restrictive and protective; once abandoned, its protection can never be recovered. Following the consummation of their quests, characters find themselves guiltily fleeing from the knowledge they have attained, as the Ancient Mariner flees from the memory of his experience.

In this undirected flight characters seem to wander in search of a "wedding guest" to whom to tell their story, someone on whom to imprint their knowledge. The need to tell the story, the conditions and implications involved in the telling, and the success that characters have in their efforts to do so reveal some of the significant forces underlying these novels. According to Coleridge, those wishing to change potential power into actual power

> . . . must impress their preconceptions on the world without, in order to present them back to their own view with the satisfying degree of clearness, distinctness, and individuality.
>
> (Biographia Literaria 172)

Without this ability, a character has only himself to confirm his own thoughts, and eventually slips into uncertainty and solipsism, asserting himself as the authority replacing that against which he transgressed. One might also view this urge to narrate as a type of sacrificial reenactment of one's transgression[3] or as a recreation of one's experiences in a positive light that might absolve one of the guilt associated with one's actions and permit reentry into society. This appears to be its function in The Monk. If it does not serve these functions, it may instead, as in Melmoth or "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", be an attempt to initiate others into consciousness and thereby to create a community of suffering on the margins of society or to transfer one's guilt by passing the story on or imprinting it on another as both the Wanderer and Ambrosio try to do.

For any of these attempts to be successful, the narrator must find the appropriate audience, one which will give the necessary response of absolution, belief, or the

acceptance of the story as his own. However, social castigation prevents characters from communicating or sharing their consciousness with others. Neither Antonia nor any of the characters that the Wanderer encounters accepts the transfer of guilt. In Caleb Williams and Melmoth, characters refuse these narrators any authority. Only in The Monk do Raymond, Agnes, Beatrice and Marguerite gain both authority and belief. However, although the narrators believe their listeners possess the power of absolution, Lewis introduces supernatural judges who supersede mortal judgement. Further, the reader has the power to overrule these judgements in his own reading of the novel.

Ultimately the perverted search to regain lost identity results in the rebelling character's recognition that he does not have the power to express himself; his destiny is annihilation. He is entrapped in his newfound awareness of the need for definitive boundaries, his inability to recover his belief in the existing ones, and his inability to find or impose new ones.

As the following quotation from Catherine Belsey's Critical Practice implies, the paradigm of transgression against apparently stable conventions has a parallel in the creation of these novels:

> We are not enslaved by the conventions which prevail in our own time. Authors do not inevitably simply reiterate the timeworn patterns of signification. Analysis reveals that at any given moment the categories and laws of the symbolic order are full of contradictions, ambiguities and inconsistencies which function as a source of possible change. The role of ideology is to suppress these contradictions in the interests of the preservation of the existing social formation, but their presence ensures that it is always possible, with whatever difficulty, to identify them, to recognize ideology for what it is, and to take an active part in transforming it by producing new meanings.
>
> (45-6)

In these novels a reader witnesses the struggle of the author's narrative against the containment of the text's structure and the author's battle to express his originality within the inescapable confines of convention and language. "The essence of Romanticism," says Mario Praz, " . . . comes to consist in that which cannot be described" (14); for this literature tries to capture "feelings and dreams which [seem] to defy . . . a

referential vocabulary" (Kiely 11). This literature relies on suggestive language to place its readers in uncertain, medial grounds of reference and to force those readers to recognize and try to fill in the gaps in expression. For "to describe is to limit and circumscribe the operations of the reader's fancy, but to suggest is to stimulate it by the intimation of grandeur or a terror beyond the compass of words" (Tompkins 256). Ultimately this serves primarily to initiate the reader into a consciousness similar to that experienced by the characters and the author, one in which no closure and no certainty is possible. The inevitable failure of both narrative and personal expression results in self-consciously transgressive, subversive and ultimately self-annihilating novels. Readers can expect not closure, but entrapment within the crumbling walls of the text. These novelists recognize this and acknowledge their own incapacity to express themselves; their self-consciousness reflects their awareness of the inadequacy of their medium:

> [The] sensation of the energies of the soul in all their strength, being in vain opposed to imbecillity and mediocrity, when aided by circumstances, is one productive alike of melancholy and of irritation. We feel, like

> prisoners in romance, bound by threads to which the power of magic has given the force of adamant.
>
> (Maturin 284)

Chapter One

Guardian Powers and Captive Usurpers

One of the most obvious and immediately impressive things about Lewis's The Monk is its sensational and lurid images of physical and social imprisonment. These images encapsulate a number of ideas about psychological and creative imprisonment. Unlike Ann Radcliffe's novels, this one takes very little notice of landscape; most of the action occurs indoors, behind walls. Convents, monasteries, tombs, rooms, cottages, boxes: all signify entrapment and isolation. Physical confines take many shapes; they include enclosure, but they also include exclusion or marginalization. Thus, one can be imprisoned either by being at the center or at the periphery; the key is restriction, and the distinction between the two is point of view.

Essentially, characters in The Monk are presented with a choice between isolation in a prison of timelessness and changelessness, and alienation in the confines of mortality, danger and fear. Neither is escapable except through death. The hierarchical structures of the family and the Church provide the foci for society; submission to

their dictates yields a sense of belonging, whereas transgression against either results in exclusion from both. Despite all attempts to preserve innocence, characters cannot avoid the entrance into self-consciousness; regardless of whether they choose to remain in that state, submitting to or upholding the authorized version of the story by shutting themselves from other stories, or whether they discover those other stories by consent or by force, they become inextricably bound in a world dominated by death.

All characters who either choose to or are educated to accept hierarchically imposed truths participate in the power structure as either oppressors or victims; these, however, are only distinctions of degree: ultimately all of these characters are controlled and circumscribed by the laws and duties associated with their roles. In her strict regimentation of her charges, the Domina thus becomes a victim of her desire to impress Ambrosio. Her belief in the importance and inflexibility of the rules she is supposed to enforce governs her behaviour. Those who, in turn, become her victims are immured in the darkness of ignorance.

Lewis depicts the limitation, avoidance and need to control associated with the acceptance of power structures

by portraying characters who remain within or enforce the hierarchical system behind monastery walls, isolated within their cells and hidden behind veils, cloaks and costumes. Shielding oneself behind a covering device marks a tendency to avoid seeing the possibility of untruth in the dictated truth; it also signifies a distrust of the self and one's ability to assert control over that self before temptation; for, as Lorenzo says, one can generally assume that "a Man who has passed the whole of his life within the walls of a Convent, cannot have found the opportunity to be guilty, even were He possessed of the inclination" (21). Perhaps, too, conforming characters fear that their faces and bodies will betray inner selves that do not coincide with their social selves. Women hide their faces behind veils and monks hide beneath their cloaks, perhaps as much to avoid seeing as to be seen. The Domina and Ambrosio similarly hide behind their masks of power and virtue:

> . . . what He wanted in purity of heart, He supplied by exterior sanctity. The better to cloak his transgression, He redoubled his pretensions to the semblance of virtue, and never appeared more devoted to Heaven as since He had broken through his engagements.
>
> (226)

As Ambrosio's self-justifying words, "I have done my duty" (49), after he reveals Agnes's crime to the Domina, suggest, these laws and duties provide masks behind which people can hide to avoid accepting personal responsibility for their actions.

Through an education that represses emotion and reinforces ignorance, authorities attempt to stifle and control sexual passion. They do so to preserve others in a state of innocence by shielding them from knowledge that can prove seditious to the authoritative story and that can destroy the one who attains it. Although their motives may differ, as Elvira's and the Domina's do, their efforts seem only to exacerbate the threat of self-consciousness posed by seduction and the arousal of passion.

A passive character, Antonia is content to be educated by the texts her protective mother presents her with; the child accepts what is given as truth. Having learned from her own experiences, Elvira intends to educate Antonia selectively, preserving her daughter's innocence by reinforcing her ignorance, in order not to further her own interests, but to protect the girl from suffering similarly painful experiences:

> [Elvira] was obliged to treat the subject [of the danger presented by Ambrosio's advances] with

> caution, lest in removing the bandage of ignorance, the veil of innocence should be rent away.
>
> (264)

The mother's substitution of romances for the Bible render Antonia ignorant and superstitious. Elvira fears that the Bible is a source of corruption because there, unlike in the romances, "Everything is called plainly and roundly by its name" (259). She believes that knowledge must remain hidden behind language that presents only partial truth: as the expurgated version of the Bible given to Antonia suggests, the authorized story does not tell the whole story.

Ironically, this protective education renders the girl more vulnerable to danger both because it prevents her from recognizing potential danger and because, as Ambrosio demonstrates, a partial truth, and the suggestiveness of a medium where things are not "called plainly and roundly by [their] name[s]" is more liable to excite the imagination: " . . . [Ambrosio's] long absence from the great world, and total unacquaintance with the common dangers of life made him form of them an idea far more dismal than the reality" (237). In Godwin's novel, Caleb asks Laura, his benefactress, "Can you believe then, that ignorance is the

only, or the safest preservation of integrity?" (300); in The Monk, Lewis suggests that neither ignorance nor partial revelation is an adequate means of protecting one from knowledge or experience.

In more sinister instances, education involves self-exaltation, the preservation of power structures and the promotion of superstition; the Domina reigns over her charges by encouraging passivity and instilling terror, and the monks strive to repress latent passions in their subjects. As a result of their tutelage,

> . . . the noble frankness of [Ambrosio's] temper was exchanged for servile humility; and in order to break his natural spirit, the Monks terrified his young mind, by placing before him all the horrors with which Superstition could furnish them.
>
> (237)

In Emile, Rousseau addresses the question of the value of an education which, like Ambrosio's, suppresses the natural passions:

> Our passions are the chief means of preservation; to try to destroy them is therefore as absurd as it is useless; this would be . . . to reshape God's handiwork. . . . I consider those who would

> prevent the birth of the passions almost as foolish as those who would destroy them.
>
> (173)

Rousseau's remark about the foolishness of trying to prevent the birth of passion is illustrated by the statement Lewis makes just before Ambrosio rapes Antonia: "His natural lust was increased in ardour by the difficulties, which had opposed his satisfying it" (379).

Isolation and restraint resulting from a "protective" education nourishes the imagination and, with it, an increasing awareness of an inner self estranged from the external one. As LeTellier states:

> ... subterranean chambers become the symbol of the buried recesses of man's mind, the reservoir of his instinctive impulses. It is here that dark inexpressible desires of the secret self find their fulfilment in a world where nightmares become real, a world of ghostly extremes where all restraint and moderation disappear.
>
> (109)

Thus, Agnes senses her inappropriate placement in the convent and responds with her imagination, painting and mocking the other nuns. In his moments alone in his cell, Ambrosio releases his imagination and his passions;

"Humility's semblance combat[s] with the reality of pride" (39) and, considering a portrait of the Madonna, he fantasizes about being "permitted to twine round [his] fingers those golden ringlets, and press with [his] lips the treasures of that snowy bosom" (41). These moments of solitude, also experienced by other characters, are frequently described as dream-states in which their repressed fantasies take control:

> During [Ambrosio's] sleep, his inflamed imagination had presented him with none but the most voluptuous objects. . . . His unsatisfied desires placed before him the most lustful and provoking Images, and he rioted in joys till then unknown to him.
>
> (67)

These dreams signify the release of irrational passion within the self; therefore, a withdrawal from society is accompanied by an inner form of escape.

The decision to rebel against roles prescribed by authorities must be enacted rather than stated to be effective. Such enactment plunges characters into dangerous new forms of incarceration in exile and self-obsession. Agnes's imagination arouses an awareness of a story beyond the one she is told she must inhabit,

inspiring a desire for an outer form of escape and a compulsion to write letters to her brother expressing her distaste for conventual life. She hopes to establish contact with a sympathetic society to facilitate her release. However, as the fate of all letters in this novel implies, such written appeals are ineffectual because those who control society also control its language; this form of transgression can be overcome by authorities who intercept or censor letters and thereby prevent communication between two potentially disruptive parties. Furthermore, letters are indirect forms of communication sent to uncertain recipients; the writer cannot know for certain if the letter's intended audience will receive the note or if that audience even exists. Characters must therefore find a means of challenging the given story without using language, the medium controlled by the authorities.

Effective transgression, characters discover, requires personal expression through action. As a form of expression, action offers a sharp contrast with the written word. According to Derrida's analysis as Leighton describes it, in Western culture action and the spoken word tend to be regarded as closer to thought and truth than the written word, which is secondary: "the function and place of language is of a handmaiden to the higher

order: the order of truth, reality, idea; the order of the signified" (Leighton 148). Action marks a direct, deliberate step away from authoritative control. Furthermore, it inflicts the inner, personal self on the public realm but lacks the control that a textual communication implies and therefore takes increasingly violent forms as The Monk progresses. In this novel, as I will demonstrate, the spoken word is associated with action; it is effective only as a means of communicating personal experience and must therefore be preceded by experience.

Anyone who violates the rules imposed by the authorities, who defies parental dictates, or who attempts to escape from his or her secluded "community" by lifting the veil that covers forbidden knowledge becomes "the Victim of Cruelty and tyrannic superstition" (351). Inner perceptions of oppression are physically realized through enforced exile and imprisonment.

At the moment of transgression, characters rebel against the restriction of and abandon the protection provided by their social identities. In doing so they plunge into an alienation in which their voices go unheard. Elvira's loss of her family and hence her social identity moves her to the periphery of society where she also loses

her voice. For although she meets three of Berdyaev's criteria of freedom by retaining her "freedom of conscience, [her] freedom of thought and [her] freedom of judgement" (136), Elvira can exert none of these with any influence beyond her chambers; even Leonella dismisses her wishes. She is incapable of reporting Ambrosio's behaviour because, as a social non-entity, "to unmask the Imposter would be no easy matter, the public being so much prejudiced in his favour" (263). Like Caleb Williams, she would not be granted the authority to affect the views cherished by society.

Perhaps the worst punishment associated with alienation is that of "perpetual solitude, [and the deprivation] of all society" (351), accompanied by an inability to communicate with any other humans. Agnes finds herself locked in her aunt's house then incarcerated within a convent; her final transgression in the garden of the convent results in alienation that resembles death: although she lives, "all Madrid believes [her] to be no more; [her] Relations are thoroughly persuaded of [her] death" (407). Her cries for help, like Antonia's shrieks as Ambrosio rapes her, "[are] unheard" (383). Even those who visit Agnes in the tombs remain deaf to her: "I implored compassion, rent the air with my cries, and

summoned both heaven and earth to my assistance. In vain!" (409). Expression without response pervades the entire novel, as characters send letters into the darkness--letters addressed to recipients whose existence the senders cannot even be sure of, letters which are constantly intercepted. Agnes suffers a fate similar to Caleb Williams--that of knowing that the only one to hear her voice is herself:

> I stretched my voice to the extent of its compass, and shrieked for aid . . . No friendly voice replied to mine. A profound and melancholy silence prevailed through the Vault, and I despaired of liberty.
>
> (404)

As a consequence of such deprivation, "Loud exclamations and passionate complaints" fade into silence and "sullen despair" (405) as Agnes and others like her enter new prisons of solipsism.

Although Ambrosio's crimes are not discovered until the end of the novel, he too suffers a more confining form of imprisonment following his initiation into sexual knowledge. Upon disregarding his social identity, he feels free to express an inner self, but discovers no freedom in doing so. For in his encounter with Matilda, he exchanges

the "restrain[t] by monastic fetters" (86) for extreme incarceration of his egotistical self within itself and from the outside world. As soon as he externalizes his irrational desires, he becomes entrapped by them; Ambrosio loses rational control and becomes enslaved:

> Naturally addicted to the gratification of the senses, in the full vigour of manhood, and heat of blood, He had suffered his temperament to acquire such ascendancy that his lust had become madness.
>
> (380)

Every progressively violent action he takes to free himself from the chains of his passions merely plunges him into deeper slavery to those passions. Like Beatrice, whose licentiousness also leads to multiple, bloody murders, including her own, and whose torment does not end even in death, Ambrosio discovers that regardless of how violent these actions become, they remain futile.

Once inside the world of awareness and experience, the interior landscape becomes more real than the outer, as Shakespeare's Sonnet 129, which also offers an excellent description of Ambrosio's madness, indicates:

Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action; and till action, lust
Is perjur'd, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;
Enjoy'd no sooner but despised straight;
Past reason hunted, and no sooner had
Past reason hated, as a swallow'd bait
On purpose laid to make the taker mad;
Mad in pursuit and in possession so;
Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;
A bliss in proof, and prov'd, a very woe;
Before, a joy propos'd; behind, a dream.
All this the world well knows; yet none knows well
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

(1-14)

This anticipatory, extreme passion, which, at the moment of fulfilment is transformed into revulsion, describes the interiority of Ambrosio's existence. Only "before" and "behind", proposals and dreams exist; his inner life is one of constant motion in which the action, or the externalized expression, is both momentary and fleeting. He can neither retain nor regain his dream and is therefore incapable of

changing his condition. The moment of action is pivotal but of less significance than the inner experiences preceding and following it, inner experiences which determine Ambrosio's existence and lock him in an unending cycle in which satisfaction is impossible.

Following his seduction by Matilda, Ambrosio becomes increasingly moved by a need to impress his knowledge on someone else. Throughout the novel, Lewis implies that there is a relationship between rhetorical and sexual seduction; both are means of persuasion that address the inner, passionate self rather than the outer rational one. The command of rhetoric tends to belong to social authorities, whereas the language of sex belongs to subversive characters. The relationship between inscribing knowledge through sexual action and the use of language to tell a story is implicit in Lewis's descriptions of Ambrosio's attempts to seduce Antonia, attempts which are confined to rhetoric when he plays his social role but which change to more explicit language and finally to action when he discards that role. While ostensibly visiting Elvira, "[Ambrosio] seized every means with avidity of infusing corruption into Antonia's bosom" (257); but in the tomb before raping her he says, "Let me instruct you in joys to which you are still a Stranger, and teach

you to feel those pleasures in my arms . . . " (382). His failure to convince Antonia to listen voluntarily to his story induces him to impose it on her violently: his imposed knowledge is that of sexuality and death.

In her violent death, Antonia appears to become a sacrificial but not a redemptive figure. Although her innocence and her life are sacrificed to Ambrosio's lust, when Ambrosio imprints his story on her and tries thereby to share his guilt or knowledge, she remains free of that guilt. Ambrosio cannot escape his guilt; he cannot even share it. And nobody can absolve him, even through sacrifice, partly because his pride and conscience refuse to give anybody, even God, the authority to do so:

> While Reason forced him to acknowledge a God's existence, Conscience made him doubt the infinity of his goodness. He disbelieved, that a Sinner like him could find mercy.
>
> (426)

Whereas Ambrosio must ultimately resort to action to communicate his knowledge because his rhetoric fails him, some characters succeed in using language to tell their stories--at least they appear to. In order to return to society, characters must symbolically reenact and recreate their crimes; language becomes a substitute for or

equivalent of action.[1] Marguerite's, Beatrice's and Agnes's releases from alienation into their families and societies are all associated with a recounting of their experiences. They draw on personal experience and employ a direct yet flexible means of communication to attain the sympathy of their listeners.

In Lewis's novel, unlike Godwin's, audiences generally grant characters the authority to tell their tales. Their confessional narratives permit them to exchange one form of confinement for another; these stories are means by which characters rejoin the social world, and signify a willingness to subject themselves to the restrictions and judgement of that world. Of this, as their constant requests for judgement based on sympathy indicate, Raymond and Marguerite are conscious:

> My nature was licentious and warm, [says Marguerite], but not cruel: My conduct had been imprudent, and my heart was not unprincipled. Judge then what I must have felt . . . Judge how I must have grieved.
>
> (124)

Despite the transgressors' belief in the ability of other characters to judge and absolve them, however, as Satan's final judgement of Ambrosio, which contrasts with

the Inquisition's implies, once characters have defied social authority, they can no longer be judged by society's standards, but are measured by psychological and supernatural values. Upon realizing what she has done, Agnes responds with horror; she has subjected herself to the judgement of God and her own conscience, which is more frightening than the judgement of her father or the Domina because neither inner nor supernatural judgement can be forgotten or ignored: "But, from the anger of God, Oh! Raymond! who shall shield me? who can protect me against my conscience, against myself?" (190). Beatrice's guilt follows her beyond the grave; like the Wandering Jew, she cannot rest but must constantly reenact her crime until her story is told and a family member reclaims her bones. Ambrosio's pride and his conscience prevent him from accepting the conventional story about Christian redemption; for he is certain that the "angel look" that Antonia gives him bids him "despair of God's forgiveness", and that Elvira's ghost will "hurl [him] down into the dwellings of Fiends, and flames, and Furies, and everlasting torments" (385). Lewis describes "the remaining years of Raymond and Agnes" not as pure bliss, but as "happy as can be those allotted to Mortals, born to be the prey of grief, and sport of disappointment" (420),

suggesting that memory and consciousness cannot be erased through confessional narrative.

In considering the inescapability of separation, isolation and enclosure, Lewis examines not only the relationship between social and psychological or outer and inner selves, but also the fundamental relationship between life and death, and its associations with process and product, time and timelessness, and consent and force. Imprisoned in the vaults, Agnes suggests that liberty will accompany death: "At length I abandoned all idea of escaping: I resigned myself to my fate, and only expected Liberty when She came the Companion of Death" (411). Is she right? Does the futile search for release from constraint, which inevitably culminates in the death of either or both the inner and outer selves, mean that freedom is thereby attained--that, like Dante in The Inferno, the characters have reached the most profound depths to discover light and freedom--or do they continue into more profound darkness?

In his discussion of Measure for Measure, Godshalk states: "life suggests freedom of movement, and death may be equated with final constraint, the end of all earthly freedom" (137); Lewis suggests that true life involves more than this. In The Monk, he indicates that life involves

change, process, the subjection to time, and the capacity to participate; therefore life can be related to experience and action.

But because of its association with time, life is accompanied by limitation. As Lewis's characters' frequent use of the word "sacrifice," [2] and his linguistic emphasis on buying, selling and possessing suggest, one must consciously make irrevocable choices. Matilda implies this in words addressed to Ambrosio that echo those spoken by Agnes's aunt, the Baroness, to Raymond (135): "I will think my sacrifice scarcely worthy to purchase your possession" (225). Ambrosio asks Matilda, "how can my offence be expiated? What atonement can purchase the pardon of my crime?" (223). Thus Ambrosio presents the dilemma faced by many characters when he says,

> My bosom would become the prey of desires, which Honour and my profession forbid me to gratify. If I resisted them, the impetuosity of my wishes unsatisfied would drive me to madness: If I yielded to the temptation, I should sacrifice to one moment of guilty pleasure my reputation in this world, my salvation in the next.
>
> (70)

Once a decision is made or an action taken, retrieving

the past is impossible; one can neither alter one's actions nor regain one's innocence and identity. For, as Theodore's poem says, "such is Man! His partial hand' Unnumbered favours writes on sand, / But stamps one little fault on solid lasting stone" (196). Following a transitional action, people lose their capacity to change, and they plunge into and are entrapped by the consequences. People's lives become governed by past actions which carry heavy and inescapable penalties. For once the goal is reached, past, present and future all present visions of misery. Agnes "expired in horror of the past, in fears for her future" (354); Ambrosio appears in his cell "Shuddering at the past, anguished by the present, and dreading the future" (422).

Despite various characters' attempts to re-establish themselves in a comforting, safe or certain environment following their introduction to the world of experience, their hope of returning to a secure position proves unjustified and inaccurate. For although enclosing spaces (such as the convent or monastery to which Agnes and Ambrosio respectively run following threatening encounters in the Garden) may appear comforting and protective, they generally prove otherwise, suggesting that ultimately one cannot hide from experience or its consequences; one is

always vulnerable. To Raymond, Baptiste's cottage seems a haven from poor weather and the dangers of the forest; however, Raymond quickly learns that his greatest enemy is his protective host, and the sanctuary is suddenly transformed into a horrifying trap. He and other characters gradually learn that they cannot retrieve their implicit trust in apparent benevolence.

Limitation of vision is also a fact of life, one which makes confusion inescapable. The betrayal of Raymond's trust in Baptiste's protection is symptomatic of the unreliability of benevolence and protection in this novel. The initiation into sexual knowledge witnesses the transformation of benevolent protectors into vengeful ravishers. For Agnes, the transition from the world of the beautiful into the world of the sublime is, she tells Raymond, marked by this very transformation:

> 'Monster of perfidy and ingratitude, how have I been deceived in you! I looked upon you as my Friend, my Protector. . . . 'Tis by you that I have been seduced into breaking my vows to God, that I am reduced to a level with the basest of my sex!'
>
> (187)

Ambrosio meets the awakening Antonia in the tombs with the

words, "Confide in my protection" (381) and then proceeds to rape her savagely. The redemptive God to whom Ambrosio has devoted his life vanishes before visions of vengeful Gods and demonic furies; Matilda accuses him of this corruption of vision: "'Tis not respect for God which restrains you, but the terror of his vengeance!" (269).

All power structures become confused as male and female, seducer and victim, constantly change roles. The relationships that develop between seducers and the seduced resemble the confusing and unstable relationship of pursuer and pursued that exists between Falkland and Caleb in Caleb Williams. The two parties inevitably play both roles. Seduction can be either a conscious or unconscious, a physical or a psychological process. Ambrosio unwittingly seduces both Matilda and Antonia with his rhetoric; and they, consciously and unconsciously respectively, seduce him with their beauty. The unconscious seducer awakens his or her partner into self-consciousness; the conscious seducer plunges his or her victim into alienation. Throughout the novel characters, particularly Ambrosio, change roles and thereby appear to change genders on the basis of their subjection to various forms of seduction. Masculinity is associated with power, but Ambrosio is never comfortable with his because his social power is constantly

undermined by and intermixed with subversive forms of seduction.

Any vision that characters do have merely mocks their impotence. For prophetic visions imply that all are doomed to dissolution and powerlessness: despite her attempts to do so, Elvira cannot change the truth of her dream that "represented to her Antonia on the verge of a precipice" (301); neither is Antonia capable of avoiding her prescribed three-o'clock meeting with her mother in death. Ambrosio discovers how powerless he has been when Satan reveals to him that he never had any control over his destiny.

Whereas Lewis associates life with personal involvement and process, he associates death with stasis, dissociation from time, isolation, and nonparticipation, or passivity. Since this is the existence that innocents lead, it is not surprising then that when Lorenzo first sees Virginia in a procession of nuns, "He consider[s] her only as a fine Statue" (348). Such a state is not limited to innocents, however. Although the Wandering Jew is condemned to an eternal "life" of movement, he suffers a torment similar to Agnes's and Antonia's in the vaults; subject to a timeless isolation without the capacity to participate in his destiny although conscious of a desire

to do so, he suffers a life-in-death. This is the state in which text-bound innocents begin and post-experiential, non-expressive characters live on.

Agnes's baby, delivered from the womb into a tomb, depicts Lewis's view of the human condition and provides a hideous version of the paradigmatic movement from a center to a periphery which, in turn, is transformed into a center. Like the baby, characters move from a condition of preservation and changelessness through a moment of active transitional experience that introduces them into time and growth; in a sense, this is a birth into life. However, this fleeting experience immediately delivers them into deeper states of isolation depicted, in Agnes's and Antonia's cases, as tombs. Thus, the lives people lead before and after experience form their prisons; throughout, characters struggle to escape these bounds, but are forced to realize that the only means of doing so is by entering the deeper bonds of death. Even Agnes's return to social conventions and restraints constitutes a return to a slightly different form of the confinement from which she initially rebelled. Thus Lewis pessimistically rejects the conception that any human imagination or any "Promethean venture" (Brombert 20) could ever abolish the prisons that people are subject to.

The narrative structure of this novel reinforces the theme of enclosure and escape; in doing so, it questions itself and its form as both imprisoned and imprisoning. It also reveals Lewis's state of awareness of a division and tension between formal textual control and imaginative narrative release.

The creative process follows a pattern analogous to the movements from innocence or identity to self-consciousness to alienation through action; the publication of this book objectifies Lewis's imagination and simultaneously alienates him and creates a new fragmented self within society. Just as the subject-object split is externalized and the two conflict, with the inner self rising to dominance, the author and his imagination, which becomes his text, separate, and the author, although inseparable from his work, having told his story through it, is cut from it just as Frankenstein is suddenly distinct from his creation when the process concludes and the product stands alone (Shelley 56). Hence, his preface reads:

> Go then, and pass that dangerous bourn
> Whence never Book can back return:
> And when you find, condemned, despised,
> Neglected, blamed, and criticised,

Abuse from All who read you fall,
(If haply you be read at all)
Sorely will you your folly sigh at,
And wish for me, and home, and quiet.

(3)

Because this novel subverts both social and literary authority, its construction is important. Lewis demonstrates an awareness of and an ability to manipulate accepted literary conventions so as to mock them. The author's tone and his struggle against convention and form reveals his awareness that he is inevitably working within convention and will be subject to the judgement of literary critics. In doing so, he raises issues of the text's imprisonment within literary and linguistic conventions, for this novel is contained by its various literary contexts. Lewis demonstrates a desire to avoid blindly imitating his predecessors. Conscious of writing within a tradition of romance, he intentionally and obviously announces his literary context and borrowings in his advertisement and through epigraphs that simultaneously recall the context and highlight the difference between those works and Lewis's. His repeated references to Measure for Measure, for example, encourage one to ponder the consequences of self-restraint and the solutions

offered in that work and to compare it with The Monk. For according to Black, Measure for Measure

> . . . is about human beings who in an uncertain world are shut up against themselves and from one another. They find release and fulfilment in 'going forth' through self-abnegation and forgiveness.
>
> (128)

In The Monk, characters either find no release but in death, or are "released" into the prison from which they originally tried to escape. With the intention of effectively arousing an emotional response in his audience, Lewis undermines the form he works with and uses sensationalism, imagination and rhetoric to transcend the bounds of tradition and to create something original. Thus, Lewis creates a dynamic tension between the text itself and the literary world beyond it.

The standard structure of the novel demands a series of prose volumes divided into coherent chapters and an omniscient moral commentator or narrator who presents a sequential plot. Lewis teases the reader by including all of these elements at the beginning of the novel. However, even as he builds these narrative and structural boundaries, Lewis subverts them. While the structural

boundaries of volumes and chapters appear to order the novel, and to affirm the controlled nature of the text, they seem incapable of suppressing or ordering Lewis's imagination, which is expressed through various narrative techniques. Just as his characters seek to escape their confines through letters and actions, Lewis tries to use his imaginative matter to subvert and transgress the bounds of his manner. Is this imaginative transgression any more successful than Lewis's characters' transgressions are? Does Lewis's narrative guide the reader or the writer out of a prison, or does it merely draw him into a deeper confine?

Lewis uses both enclosing circular and expanding linear narrative patterns to undermine the structural boundaries of volumes, chapters, prose and sequential order. Within the novel, which itself is a container, the author creates numerous others, each of which holds a story; Lewis embeds Raymond's narrative, which in turn contains Marguerite's and Beatrice's tales, within the central story. Elvira's history also appears inside the main plot. When Raymond relates his story, he does so without any interruption by the volume boundaries he crosses, thereby showing that the textual definitions do not control or even influence the flow of the narrative. These

embedded narratives draw the reader deeper into the past and closer to the source of each surrounding tale, ostensibly unfolding various mysteries; however, as my discussion of the narrators will show, they actually reveil and distort, destroying all hopes for clarification or an absolute presentation of truth or morality.

Just as this series of embedded tales emphasizes enclosure, a series of parallel narrative strands stressing linear development also contrives to undermine textual structure. Throughout the novel, Lewis explores every possible avenue of escape for his characters by tracing all of the permutations and combinations of experience, only to find destruction at the end of each. This constant paralleling of situations reinforces the sense that once imprisoned, all one can do is escape into another kind of confinement from which the only true release is the freedom of death. Maturin provides a description that is applicable to Lewis's narrative processes:

> There is not, perhaps, a more painful exercise of the mind than that of treading with weary and impatient pace, the entire round of thought, and arriving at the same conclusion for ever; then setting out again with increased speed and

> diminished strength, and again returning to the same spot.
>
> (284)

In a sense, this linear pattern becomes circular in its compulsiveness and repetitiveness; instead of supporting conventional sequential form, it undermines it. The author's attempt to escape from the enclosing text through narrative succeeds in subverting that form, but only by locking that narrative into a recurring pattern of reenactment that resembles the fate Beatrice suffers.

As I have suggested, Lewis does not restrict himself either to prose or to a sequential pattern. Although the novel appears to move forward at a regular pace, that steady progression is constantly interrupted by flashbacks, predictions and symbolic hints in the form of dreams, prophecies, histories, and poetry. Lorenzo's dream symbolically pretells the novel's ending, and thereby undermines the sequential order that apparently governs the novel:

> Antonia shrieked. The Monster clasped her in his arms, and springing with her upon the Altar, tortured her with his odious caresses. . . . Instantly the Cathedral seemed crumbling into pieces . . . ; the Altar sank down, and in its

> place appeared an abyss vomiting forth clouds of flame. Uttering a loud and terrible cry the monster plunged into the Gulph.
>
> (28)

This dream depicts the dissolution of Antonia's innocence, the crumbling of the Church's authority, and the inevitable fate that Ambrosio suffers.

The text is given to a reader as a complete product, and therefore is expected to be inherently static; Lewis, however, subverts this quality by constantly shifting the point of view, and thereby also affecting the nature of the narrative. The novel commences with a partially-omnipotent narrator; this narrator is capable of entering Ambrosio's mind and conveying his motives and innermost fantasies. Although he cannot reveal the interior landscapes of other characters in such detail, he has the privilege of making moral judgements about everyone. Because on several occasions the narrator defends or justifies Ambrosio's actions or thoughts, one senses some sympathy on his part; he attributes Ambrosio's violent lust to the fact that "[h]is Instructors carefully repressed those virtues, whose grandeur and disinterestedness were ill-suited to the Cloister" (237). This portion of the novel concentrates on the psychological process of Ambrosio's seduction by

Matilda.

In chapter two of volume one, Lewis introduces Raymond as another narrator within this framing narration; Raymond apparently pulls the reader back in time to the center of the story while he tries to justify himself to Lorenzo and, implicitly, to the reader. Within this frame lies Marguerite's confession, which, one must realize, is distorted by her own subjectivity and compounded by Raymond's. Lewis draws the reader further from the frame when Raymond conveys the story of the Bleeding Nun as told him by Agnes, who heard it from her nurse, who knew it through tradition. Later, he tells the same tale as related to him by the Wandering Jew, who had heard it one hundred years before from an exorcist, who was told it by the Nun's ghost. This section is distinctive because rather than concentrating on inner experience, it uses personal narrative to convey episodic, exterior, active experience.

In considering this structure, one cannot merely accept the text as a stable form but must wonder whether this series of tales peels off veils of concealment and distance, or whether it puts more on, pulling the reader away from the main, or "central" tale. The immediate narrator shifts, but the point of view in the second

section is always first person; therefore, the emphasis and probably the information is selective. The increased distancing and accumulating distortion suggests that Raymond reveils as much as he reveals. Is the tale at the physical heart of the book the central story, or is the outer, peripheral, closing and enclosing one Lewis's focus? Coleridge proclaimed that the enclosed narrative is too long and therefore distracts the reader from the novel's focus.[3] However, I would like to suggest that Lewis's self-consciousness, as demonstrated by instances set off by brackets where the external narrator intrudes into this narration to remind the reader of the containing structure, raises the possibility that the author blurs the boundaries between central and peripheral tales to challenge both the authority and importance of his framing narrator's commentary.

For the judgemental framing narrator seems to be subverted in several ways. Although this narrator appears to control the text and to act in a conventional manner, as moralizer, he is displaced at the end of the novel by Satan, who, supported by Matilda, expresses the accepted social morality espoused by that narrator and, presumably, by an eighteenth-century audience: he lectures Ambrosio as Ambrosio lectured those in the novel's opening scene:

"And it was you who thought yourself proof against temptation, absolved from human frailties, and free from error and vice! Is pride then a virtue? Is inhumanity no fault?" (440). Satan also takes responsibility for punishing Ambrosio. At the end of the novel, Satan reveals himself as the omniscient manipulator behind Ambrosio's actions and thoughts; by including this detail, Lewis subtly associates his framing narrator with Satan. This, of course, is self-ironic, for the author undermines that narrator's perceptions and opinions, and mocks the audience for accepting his morality and point of view. Thus, Lewis subverts the underlying tradition and expectations of his audience, proposing a new perspective and challenging his audience either to adopt his perspective and to join with him in a peripheral community, or to be a victim of his mockery. He simultaneously separates himself from society by his act and creates a new identity for himself, an identity that arises from his transgression.

Artistic creativity like emotional passion is repressed by controlling forces and such repression nourishes that creativity until it becomes dominant and bursts through in excessive expression; as Raymond tells Theodore, the need to express personal perspectives may become obsessive: "Authorship is a mania to conquer which

no reasons are sufficiently strong; and you might as easily persuade me not to love, as I persuade you not to write" (199). This impulse to create implies a powerful inner self and a rejection of the social or literary conventions that stifle it. Louis Peck's suggestion that in his description of Theodore, who has this mania, "Lewis was describing himself as a child - his precocious skill in music, verse, and language, and his keenness for authorship" (39) raises the possibility that as a writer, Lewis felt possessed by obsessive passions just as his main characters do.

Lyndenberg suggests that Lewis is concerned about the controlling, destructive power of his own narrative: "the most urgent concern of Lewis's fiction may not be violent sexuality or supernaturalism, but the power of eloquence" (77). Sexual passion and the unbridled imagination, he claims, are less dangerous than the affective powers of literature and rhetoric. This is not surprising in light of David Hume's remark that "Nothing is more capable of infusing any passion into the mind, than eloquence, by which objects are represented in their strongest and most lively colours" (473). In this novel, eloquence is a tool employed by social powers to veil meanings and to control people; that power can destroy individuals: "Oh! how I

drank your words! how your eloquence seemed to steal me from myself" (60). It is an unrestrainable medium; for language and its power to affect people's emotions can escape the control of the speaker or the writer. Lorenzo discovers this when the crowd he hopes to arouse goes into a frenzy. They no longer act as individuals but surrender themselves to the common panic. For Lewis, controlling his reading audience is equally difficult. Once a book is published or words are spoken, their contents gain distinct identities; their sources or creators no longer have any control over them because those words are irretrievable and become subject to finality.

Lewis finds himself in a similar situation to that of his characters; using language to convey his vision, he is in a social construct that contains the seeds of its own change, but nourishing those seeds constitutes a rebellious, transgressory act. For, as Catherine Belsey points out, "it is in language that the ideology inscribed in the language can be challenged" (44):

> Analysis reveals that at any given moment the categories and laws of the symbolic order are full of contradictions, ambiguities and inconsistencies which function as a source of possible change. The role of ideology is to

> suppress these contradictions in the interests of the preservation of the existing social formation, but their presence ensures that it is always possible, with whatever difficulty, to identify them, to recognize ideology for what it is, and to take an active part in transforming it by producing new meanings.
>
> (45-6)

Lewis tries to "take an active part" in transcending the bounds of language by constantly disrupting his prose narrative with poetic inserts which use language symbolically to expand the novel's meaning beyond the bounds defined by prose literature. He also attempts to "produc[e] new meanings" by using language and form against themselves. Thus, he inflates his traditional, two-dimensional figures and their conventional situations by sensationalizing them, and his imagination explodes in excessive, even rebellious language. His use of pronouns and grammatical juxtaposition to suggest a complete subversion of both authority and truth is apparent in an outburst that is confused both by a reader's desire to sympathize with the words, and by his awareness, on a second reading, of who is speaking (Matilda):

> Disgusted with a perfidious world, in what happy

> region does Truth conceal herself? Father, I hoped that She resided here; I thought that your bosom had been her favourite shrine. And you too prove false? Oh God! And you too can betray me? (69)

His narrative and the form it uses serve both to transgress the bounds which contain his imagination and to create a new perspective.

In publishing his novel, Lewis exposes himself to the judgement of social and literary critics but he also creates a new society, a new tradition which others are invited, through reading the novel, to join. Not surprisingly, this sensational, extreme novel attracted negative criticism, much of which was directed not only at the work, but also at its author. He himself was so involved in his creation that he preferred to be called "Monk" Lewis. As a result of literary criticism and his own reworking of various parts of the novel, for many years following the publication of his major work he was haunted by and, perhaps, controlled by it; it helped shape a new identity. For in writing it, Lewis simultaneously destroyed his passive response to convention and built an active individual identity shaped by his experience.

Chapter Two

"A Half-Told and Mangled Tale"

Like The Monk, Caleb Williams presents a world of instability, judgement and punishment, but within a political rather than a religious power structure; despite this difference, both novels confront similar psychological and creative issues and both have a theological undertone. In Caleb Williams, Godwin presents a world which appears to be founded on certainty, on hierarchical social systems and on definite moral values. That world and the text, however, quickly crumble as its central character-narrator sinks into a consciousness of guilt and instability that contributes to the disintegration of Caleb's sanity. The reader joins Caleb in his journey into the labyrinths of himself, and suffers a similar fate as both the narrator's and the reader's terms of reference fade and the reader's function is denied.

In the first part of the novel, Godwin appears to present a romantic fantasy world in which absolute values reign. Innocence and guilt, virtue and vice, benevolence and tyranny, self and other, inner and outer, subjective and objective experience, character, author and narrator,

adventure and reality seem easily distinguishable. Godwin places Falkland and Tyrrel in diametric opposition within a context of clearcut oppressor-sufferer-saviour triangles. Tyrrel, a large, crude "insolent bashaw" (18) who exults in and exploits his power to tyrannize over innocent and helpless victims, becomes locked in a conflict of influence and jealousy with Falkland, a diminutive, benevolent man equipped with "the sagacity of a cultivated mind" (19) whose concerns lie in maintaining his reputation, and in helping those inferior to himself. The victim appears innocent and helpless. In this section, hierarchical powers are clearly defined.

Political rather than religious powers control this society; the hierarchy is based on the ownership of land. Tyrrel, whose name barely masks the underlying "tyrant", exercises his power as such; he wields his power destructively, inspiring terror in those who cross him. Falkland possesses a similar amount of power, but exercises it benevolently; as he tells his rival, it is his view that

> . . . we must not use the advantage that accident has given us, with an unmerciful hand. Poor wretches! they are pressed almost beyond bearing as it is; and, if we unfeelingly give another

> turn to the machine, they will be crushed to atoms.
>
> (77)

This attitude reflects his tendency to recognize the effects of his power on those beneath him and to treat them condescendingly rather than destructively. Because both men have enormous control over the lives of their lessees, they are referred to by others as and seem to consider themselves as kinds of deities; Tyrrel refers to Hawkins as his "creature" (77) and reminds him of his helpless position: "I made you what you are; and, if I please, can make you more helpless and miserable than you were when I found you" (70). Falkland echoes these words in a conversation with Caleb (284). As semi-deities and controllers of judgement, these men have the power to manipulate the legal system for their own purposes: " . . . the law was better adapted for a weapon of tyranny in the hands of the rich, than for a shield to protect the humbler part of the community against their usurpations" (73). In this fairly straightforward hierarchy, most characters know their positions; those who do not are subject to the punishment dealt them by their squires.

If, however, one examines this world more closely-- as Caleb does, and as Godwin forces one to do--"turn[ing] it a

thousand ways, and examin[ing] it in every point of view" (107), the truth loses its sharp edge and the universally accepted assumptions open themselves to challenges. One realizes that the ground upon which society in this novel is based, "instead of being permanent, [are] in some sort perpetually changing" (126). For Falkland and Tyrrel, as Falkland himself remarks, are similar in many ways: Falkland's benevolence and his attempts to create a peace with Tyrrel are undermined by his irritating lofty manner, and Tyrrel demonstrates some positive qualities as long as people do not cross him or respond to his favours with "ingratitude." Neither is the victimization of innocent inferiors as straightforward as the narrator would like us to believe: Hawkins knows Tyrrel's reputation and, says Caleb, "ought to have foreseen the consequences" of "contesting with a man of Mr. Tyrrel's eminence and fortune" (72) and crossing hierarchical boundaries, and through her music, Emily exercises conscious seductive control over Tyrrel: when "she [goes] to her harpsichord, and play[s] one after another several of those airs that were most the favourites of Mr. Tyrrel," although Tyrrel views her as "the poor innocent whose powers [are] exerted to please him," those powers are employed only to further "the cause she [is] going to plead" (52). She therefore

does not deserve the epithet of "artless" (45) that Caleb gives her. The challenge of such idealistic and superficial dualities in a search for the truth yields instead increasing mystery and emptiness. For definite surfaces of certain values and "realities" merely mask an inexpressible truth of confusion, entrapment and inconsistency.

Caleb's questioning of assumed truths and the forbidden knowledge that he attains threatens more than Falkland's name; this knowledge challenges and threatens to topple the system of beliefs upon which the world as Caleb knows it is based. Caleb gains the fatal consciousness that "without boundaries there is senseless vacuity. But those boundaries are themselves things of air" (DePorte 164); such awareness undermines all social assumptions of the correspondence between belief and truth, about the infallibility of authority and the story it promotes. To attain such knowledge, Caleb has "sold himself" at "a dear bargain" (136). For his consciousness of Falkland's guilt removes him to a world in which surfaces of simplified oppositions fade and underlying confusion gains dominance. He learns that all the assumptions upon which his society is founded are illusions; diametric oppositions merge together until they become indistinguishable and Caleb's world gradually disintegrates before his eyes. He can

never recapture it and can never regain a sense of security except through death.

As a result of their union in secrecy, Caleb and Falkland are inextricably bound in a relationship like that which exists between Frankenstein and his creature in which each comprises one half of a split self. Despite their fatal shared consciousness, they exist as separate entities, each carrying some measure of guilt, each reflecting an aspect of the other's self, and each desiring freedom from that guilt; Falkland maintains his reputation and is tortured from within, while Caleb maintains his integrity but suffers social degradation. Because each has the potential to destroy the other's remaining innocence, their relationship is one of mutual fear and distrust. Ironically, Caleb declares that while in prison,

> I thought with unspeakable loathing of those errors, in consequence of which every man is fated to be more or less the tyrant or the slave. . . . So far as related to myself, I resolved . . . to hold myself disengaged from this odious scene, and never fill the part either of the oppressor or the sufferer.
>
> (156)

When he says this he has already clearly played both parts;

this suggests that neither he nor Falkland can avoid or escape from his role as both pursuer and pursued. Their relationship, in which, Caleb says, "we were each of us a plague to the other" (122), like the one described as existing between Falkand and Tyrrel, involves mutual torment:

> This Falkland haunts me like a demon. I cannot wake but I think of him. I cannot sleep, but I see him. . . . he is my perpetual torment. . . . [Tyrrel] seemed to lie in wait for his victim, and to collect his venom for a mortal assault.
>
> (31)

The two men and the two roles they play, like two sides of the same page, cannot be torn apart; they are bound together and destined for mutual destruction, for "the enslaving of another is also the enslaving of oneself" (Berdyaev 132).

This self-enslavery also involves self-alienation, as Berdyaev asserts:

> The world of slavery is the world of spirit which is alienated from itself. . . . Alienation, exteriorization, the ejection of the spiritual nature of man into the external denote the slavery of man.
>
> (131)

Thus, alienated and entrapped, Caleb and Falkland gain a fatal awareness that once one has a knowledge of the disparity between belief and truth, a return to innocence, peace of mind, and the positive correspondence of inner and outer selves or identity is impossible. Instead, they each become locked in an existence where self and other are simultaneously separated and united and where releasing one requires the destruction of the other which, ironically, also destroys the one released.

In his quest to know the "different modes in which the human intellect displays its secret workings" (123), Caleb transgresses not only the boundaries of a master-servant relationship, but also those boundaries which separate individuals: the boundaries erected between public and private selves. He delves beneath the surface of Falkland's public or objectified self, then seeks evidence of his private self in the public one: "I will trace the mazes of his thought. Surely . . . his secret anguish must betray itself" (126). Such probing, Caleb learns, is dangerous. For when he finds Caleb watching him, Falkland expresses his outrage with a scarcely veiled threat that he later carries out: "you set yourself as a spy upon my actions. . Do you think you shall watch my privacies with impunity?" (8). Caleb subjects Falkland to the torment of

perpetual observation and resents the confinement resulting from similar scrutiny when Falkland gains control:

> I was his prisoner: and what a prisoner! All my actions observed; all my gestures marked. I could move neither to the right nor the left, but the eye of my keeper was upon me. He watched me; and his vigilance was a sickness to my heart.
>
> (143)

Such incessant and omniscient observation of one character by another in the doubling or split-self relationship that exists between the two men suggests the presence of an external conscience and, as Berdyaev implies, this denotes entrapment:

> The free man is simply the man who does not allow the alienation, the ejection into the external of his conscience and his judgement. He who permits this is a slave.
>
> (140)

Thus Godwin writes: "The vigilance even of a public and systematical despotism is poor, compared with a vigilance which is thus goaded by the most anxious passions of the soul" (138). This external scrutiny prevents any escape from either the social world of appearances or the inner vigilance of the conscience; both Caleb and Falkland

declare that "sleep has fled from [their] eyes" (120; 305). Without the escape of dreams, life becomes a perpetual waking nightmare.

Because of a consciousness of guilt, this awareness of being constantly observed is transformed into a paranoid sense of being persecuted and pursued in a response to the supposed assurances of Psalm 139:

> For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. . . . whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.
>
> (4, 7-8)

Under constant vigilance, the boundaries between a character's inner and outer self fade, and he loses his sense of privacy and control. All hope for peace of mind vanishes:

> It was like what has been described of the eye of omniscience pursuing the guilty sinner, and darting a ray that awakens him to new sensibility, at the very moment that, otherwise, exhausted nature would lull him into a temporary oblivion of the reproaches of his conscience.
>
> (305)

Falkland and Caleb's attempts to deny this merging of oppositions and to remain in the defined world ultimately destroy them. For Falkland tries to disguise his guilt with the facade of his reputation, but discovers that his inner life spills into and is projected onto his social life; his exertion of self-control following a lack of self-possession is futile. Initially, his calm manner is occasionally overcome by "fits of insanity" (134), paranoia and guilt, but as Caleb continually reminds him of that guilt, his outbursts become more frequent and Falkland sinks into deeper isolation, withdrawing into sublime landscapes of rocks, precipices and rushing torrents (124). Eventually he projects his sense of persecution onto Caleb, who, constantly reminding him of his guilt and lecturing him on morality, acts as a physical manifestation of Falkland's inner self.

Once initiated into this consciousness of chaos, Caleb, too, asserts his belief in the dualistic oppositions underlying all experience; in one instance he undermines Falkland's defence by telling his master that "innocence and guilt are too much confounded in human life" (117). Gradually all of his assertions, which sometimes tend to be contradictory, are denied. As each assertion is shown to be false, Caleb's realization of the depth of his

imprisonment increases. He tries to maintain a belief in Collins's view of the world, which states that

> . . . the man who can deliberately meet his adversary for the purpose of exposing the person of one or both of them to injury, tramples upon every principle of reason and equity,
>
> (98)

and he judges himself by the values underlying that view while at the same time learning that such values have no foundation in his reality. When his inner self or "character"[1] fails to meet Collins's standards of integrity, his illusions fail and he realizes that his character reflects his outer self or soiled "reputation" with which he has been burdened. Consequently, he understands that no remnant of his former self remains.

Tyrrel, Falkland and Caleb are destroyed only when their inner and outer selves regain a new kind of identity, when each self reflects the other's corruption. Falkland's curses give "body and voice to the spectre that haunted [Tyrrel], and to the terrors of which he was an hourly prey" (78); Tyrrel is murdered shortly after his society alienates him from its midst; although "haggard, emaciated and fleshless" (280) beforehand, Falkland dies only after his inner consciousness of guilt is confirmed in public and

he stands "completely detected" (324); Caleb realizes with horror that at the end of the book he has no character to vindicate because in destroying his master he has lost the inner consciousness of his integrity. He therefore has no character left, no inner integrity to contradict his reputation; he is shaped by and becomes trapped in the authorized version of his story, the social reputation imposed upon him. His quest to reestablish the unity of his inner and outer selves has a perverted conclusion because ultimately the identity he discovers is an absence of identity.

Because Falkland represents a system of absolutes on which the beliefs of an entire society are founded, the knowledge into which Caleb is initiated is revolutionary and leads not only to his isolation with his secret doubts, but also to his alienation just as it does when characters attain subversive sexual knowledge in The Monk. For "any social structure tends to exclude as 'evil' anything radically different from itself or which threatens it with destruction" (Jackson 52). When Caleb defensively articulates his own disbelief in the "impartial construction" (168) of the accepted story by making insinuating accusations against Falkland, he finds that his isolation, his personal sense of his separateness and difference, is transformed into

alienation; the solitude he only felt before becomes realized in the social world. Because members of society "do not wish to have [their] understanding perverted, and all the differences of things concealed from [their] apprehension" (300), they cast Caleb out and silence him by refusing to listen to his claims to innocence. Thus, the quest for truths hidden beneath firmly established surfaces of social identity leads Caleb into increasing alienation from his ideals, his home, his fellow outsiders, and eventually from all of mankind; he loses all conception of belonging even to his own species. Throughout the novel he seeks a benefactor, a surrogate parent, in a futile attempt to regain a sense of belonging within a firm hierarchical order; however, constant rejection and betrayal remind him that he cannot return to past innocence. Despite his attempts to regain his identity by writing to recover the past, by proclaiming his innocence and by seeking parental benefactors, he can neither erase his consciousness nor return to a community that continues to believe in preconceptions that he knows are false.

Caleb's alienation drives him into solipsism and paranoia:

> In every human countenance I feared to find the countenance of an enemy. I shrunk from the

> vigilance of every human eye. . . . I was shut up a deserted, solitary wretch in the midst of my species. . . . instead of seeking to identify myself with the joys and sorrows of others, and exchanging the delicious gifts of confidence and sympathy, [I] was compelled to centre my thoughts and my vigilance in myself.
>
> (255)

He has increasing difficulty in distinguishing between subjective and objective experience as he sinks deeper into himself. When he is first imprisoned, and isolated in darkness, he tries to maintain a sense of hope by repeatedly recounting his own life story, and imagining various situations from which he might extricate himself; in his enthusiasm, he declares, "I became myself a poet" (186). By making such a declaration he assumes all authority for distinguishing between speculation and poetry. He also aligns himself with romantic poets who claim to find a release of the imagination in prison.[2] It is in this state of self-affirmation that he makes his most defiant claims of strength against Falkland. This withdrawal into the self continues throughout, for Caleb spends his entire existence alone. As the novel progresses, objective experience fades into the background

and subjective experience becomes more prominent. The social realm and the physical landscape appear dreamlike and symbolically merge with psychological landscapes. David Cox remarks: "Any attempt to conceive of the self in isolation from the outside world is dangerous; solipsism can destroy a person's sense of his own being" (20). For Caleb, such solipsism eventually leads to madness, for his flight from his social self sends him through the labyrinths of his mind and finally into the darkness of madness. His sense of persecution like Ambrosio's lust takes control over his mind. Godwin depicts this journey and its accompanying disintegration into madness symbolically in scenes of wandering and raving:

> I perceived that I was wholly out of my road. . . . I muttered imprecations and murmuring, as I passed along. I was full of loathing and abhorrence of life, and all that life carries in its train. After wandering without any certain direction for two hours, I was overtaken by the night. . . .
>
> (251)

Like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner's and Maturin's Wanderer's, Caleb's existence following his transgression is one of wandering directed only by a need to find the

right listener to whom to tell his story:

> I pass, like night, from land to land;
> I have strange power of speech;
> That moment that his face I see,
> I know the man that must hear me:
> To him my tale I teach.
>
> ("The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" 586-90)

Yet Caleb, unlike the Mariner and the Wanderer, cannot even convince anybody to listen to him. As Caleb's above statement implies, he will eventually be "overtaken by the night" of despair. Thus, the reader listens as Caleb's murmurs become disjointed exclamatory cries when he later considers suicide (270).

With only himself to grant authority to his belief in his integrity, that integrity becomes increasingly unstable; in Godwin's manuscript ending, Caleb says: "Perhaps I am beguiling myself during all this time" (332). Self-affirmation cannot sustain Caleb through all of the alienation he experiences. For without external confirmation of the existence of the only self that he claims to possess, he begins to doubt its existence:

> I endeavoured to sustain myself by the sense of my integrity, but the voice of no man upon earth echoed the voice of my conscience. 'I called

> aloud; but there was none to answer; there was none that regarded.' To me the whole world was as unhearing as the tempest, and as cold as the torpedo.
>
> (308)

As his quotation from Psalm 69.20 suggests, Caleb's alienation is complete; no longer having faith in any but an avenging deity, he feels absolutely abandoned and uncertain. All hope seems ungrounded. For he has only his own authority to rely upon, and, as he declares shortly after, he is no longer certain of his sanity.

At the moment of consciousness, when a character attains knowledge of the "true" story underlying the authoritative defining story, surfaces lose their meaning. The present is subverted by the absent, the unuttered, or the undefined, which, in a sense, thereby becomes more predominant, more present, just as the inner self gains ascendancy over the outer, visible self and inner landscapes assume more realistic forms than do outer landscapes. As characters project their inner life onto the outer world, the two are confused so that uncertainty poses a greater threat and commands more power than does certainty. Emily's reticence regarding Falkland thus tortures Tyrrel far more than her praises did:

> His imagination, ingenious in torment, suggested to him all the different openings in conversation in which she would have introduced the praise of Mr. Falkland, had she not been placed under this unnatural restraint. Her present reserve upon the subject was even more insufferable than her former loquacity.
>
> (46)

Significantly, Falkland wants Caleb to remain in his employ, preferring the certainty of his presence as much as the ability to exercise control over Caleb. He fears not what Caleb has said, but what he has yet to articulate. Caleb is himself pursued by an invisible and enigmatic force: Mr. Falkland, who appears only rarely and briefly in volumes two and three, "had always been to my imagination an object of wonder, and that which excites our wonder we scarcely suppose ourselves competent to analyse" (297). Caleb hurls himself into an indeterminate future, pursued by an invisible yet seemingly omnipotent force whose threats are undefined. The threat posed by such absences lies in their uncertainty:

> The minutes in which I did not actually perceive him, were contaminated and blasted with the certain expectation of his speedy interference.

> . . . My sensations at certain periods amounted to insanity.
>
> (306)

Even Falkand's death does not rid Caleb of his presence, for "[h]is figure is ever in imagination before me. Waking or sleeping I still behold him" (324).

Just as the absence of any external corroboration of character forces Caleb to look within for confirmation of the existence of that character, and gaps in his education prompt Ambrosio to fill them with his imagination, uncertainty about the pursuers and their intentions compels characters to fill the gaps of knowledge with their frightened imaginations. Inner environments of paranoia, obsessiveness and guilt are projected into those spaces. As a result, characters exaggerate the unspoken, the undefined, and the invisible. Hume explains this phenomenon in his Treatise on Human Nature:

> [The] image of fear naturally converts into the thing itself, and gives us a real apprehension of evil, as the mind always forms its judgments more from its present disposition than from the nature of its objects.
>
> (492)

Falkland imagines himself persecuted, as his response to

Caleb's probings reflects:

> It is a part of the misery of my situation, that I am at the mercy of every creature, however little, who feels himself inclined to sport with my distress.
>
> (120)

In Caleb's imagination, Falkland is transformed from squire to benevolent deity to pursuing demon, and "the whole human species [appear] as so many hangmen and torturers. [He] consider[s] them as confederated to tear [him] to pieces" (183). Not even Caleb's reasoning abilities can overcome his imaginative response to his experiences:

> In vain I said, Mr. Falkland, wise as he is and pregnant in resources, acts by human and not by supernatural means. . . . He cannot, like those invisible personages who are supposed from time to time to interfere in human affairs, ride in the whirlwind, shroud himself in clouds and impenetrable darkness, and scatter destruction upon the earth from his secret habitation. Thus it was that I bribed my imagination. . . .
>
> (296)

Like Lewis's characters, Caleb is granted consciousness without the capacity to have any effect on

his destiny. Despite his attempt to persuade himself to the contrary (277), Caleb learns that he possesses potential but not actual power to clear his name and end his misery: "To my own conception I was like a man, who though blasted with lightning and deprived for ever of the power of motion, should yet retain consciousness of his situation" (134). In his alienated state, his greatest frustration derives from his inability to persuade people of his innocence; he becomes trapped within himself without the power to make others see him as he sees himself (Kiely 93). Initially he claims to maintain his silence voluntarily regarding Falkland's secret; however, he discovers that his reticence is actually enforced and imprisoning. For despite his gift with words, he can speak but cannot persuade or be heard, because nobody will grant him any authority to do so. Like Tyrrel, he is "mocked with the shadow of power; and, when he lift[s] his hand to smite, it [is] struck with sudden palsy" (80). He is conscious of his own integrity but cannot communicate beyond himself and therefore cannot escape his prisons of silence and self.

Caleb is also trapped within a prison of perpetual motion that has both psychological and metaphysical implications. The sense of constantly shifting grounds of

morality and ideas is intensified by the energy propelling the plot and driving Caleb's thoughts. Caleb embarks on an obsessive quest for knowledge; when Caleb reaches his goal and tries to tell his story only to discover that nobody wants to listen, this quest is transformed into circuitous wandering like that of the Wanderer in Maturin's novel. Caleb travels across the country from coast to coast, wandering through labyrinths, trying to reach the centre, which Godwin physically represents as London, by taking circuitous routes to the periphery and back. His actual travels, his adventures as it were, which exude a dream-like quality, serve as symbolic representations of Caleb's inner journey, which becomes his reality, or "things as they are" to him:

> The line I pursued was of irregular surface, sometimes obliging me to climb a steep ascent, and at others to go down into a dark and impenetrable dell. I was often compelled by the dangerousness of the way to deviate considerably from the direction I wished to pursue. . . .
>
> (209)

Wandering or racing, his thoughts are in constant motion, preventing any hope for inner peace.

Caleb rarely experiences a static moment in this

novel, for he tends either to be in pursuit of a goal or, like Frankenstein, fleeing from it once it has been attained, futilely hoping to deny or escape it. This compelling momentum reflects the motion of time that Caleb tries and fails to counter by writing his memoirs. He is propelled forward and cannot return to the innocence of his past; all mistakes are irreparable. This perpetual motion towards an uncertain but dreaded future depicts Godwin's uncompromising view of life as a prison of instability driving one towards an unavoidable end.

Despite his frequent assertions of the sovereignty of the mind, Caleb constantly finds that he is compelled to behave as he does first by an inner obsession and later by an external power. Both Caleb and Emily, whose experiences as victim of Tyrrel's persecution resemble Caleb's, defy the powers assembled against them with claims that neither their reputations nor their minds can be affected by external tyranny. Early on, Caleb claims:

> Innocence and guilt were, in my apprehension, the things in the world the most opposite to each other. I would not suffer myself to believe, that the former could be confounded with the latter, unless the innocent man first allowed himself to be subdued in mind, before he was

> defrauded of the good opinion of mankind.
>
> (160)

Curiosity and his obsessive desire to hear the true story underlying that which Collins has told drive him toward a moment of reversal, and destiny, demons and fate drive him away from it. His entire existence seems out of his control:

> To the sufferer the course of events is taken out of his direction, and he is hurried along with an irresistible force, without finding it within the compass of his efforts to check their rapidity.
>
> (163)

Caleb denies his ability to control his actions regardless of whether he is tormenting Falkland or fleeing from him: "I had a confused apprehension of what I was doing, but I could not stop myself" (113); "I have always tried to stop myself, but the demon that possessed me was too strong for me" (119); "It was a kind of fatal impulse that seemed destined to hurry me to my destruction" (121).

Prophetic statements or sentiments expressed by numerous characters further emphasize both the inevitability of destiny and the agony of consciousness of restraint without the power of effecting an escape. Dreams, prophecies, and curses such as that which Falkland

directs toward Tyrrel that tend to become future realities, do not permit characters to change their destinies: "I fear, sir, that [the consequences of the strife between us are] pregnant with death at least to one of us, and with misfortune and remorse to the survivor" (29). Instead, these prophesies only illuminate an unavoidable future. Thus, in a world of blindness, even the moments of illumination frustrate; they grant people consciousness but no power to act upon it. Caleb's rebellious cries against his destiny reflect his frustration with his impotence:

> This is not my place in the roll of existence, the place for which either my temper or my understanding has prepared me! To what purpose serve the restless aspirations of my soul, but to make me, like a frightened bird, beat myself in vain against the inclosure of my cage? Nature, barbarous nature, to me thou hast proved indeed the worst of step-mothers; endowed me with wishes insatiate, and sunk me in never-ending degradation!
>
> (256)

Whenever characters exert themselves to escape from their entrapment, they, like Lewis's characters, discover not freedom at the outside of the walls, but a deeper form

of imprisonment at the centre of another prison. Caleb attempts to escape from the prison that Falkland's mansion has become only to find himself in a county prison; following an unsuccessful escape from there, he is bound more tightly and isolated within his cell. Like Tyrrel, "the more he struggle[s], the more desperate his situation appear[s] to become" (93). Whenever Caleb exerts himself "to extricate [him]self from prison," he is dragged back "to the point from which [he] began" (274). As Gines informs him,

> The squire is determined you shall never pass the reach of his disposal. He has therefore given orders that, whenever you attempt to do so, you shall be converted from a prisoner at large to a prisoner in good earnest.
>
> (313)

These images of increasing physical restraint are parallel to and concretely represent the increasing depths of psychological imprisonment that Caleb experiences.

Thus Caleb finds that the boundaries between body and mind and between reputation and character or psychological and social selves are illusory. Such a discovery would appear to release him from the restraint by arbitrary structures, but instead it plunges Caleb into himself and

ultimately sends him into a prison of consciousness of a reality that eventually drives him mad. In this discovery, he becomes aware that no ingenuity can overcome external oppression, no exercise of the will can alter one's destiny. In fact, each attempt to effect such a change results not in escape but in deeper states of incarceration. Despite all of his ingenious and determined attempts to defy it, Caleb is forced to accept Tyrrel's claim that "we are as God made us. . . . As for consequences, what must be must be" (30), and Collins's dehumanizing but absolving statement that "you did not make yourself; you are just what circumstances irresistibly compelled you to be" (310).

The form that Godwin gives Caleb Williams not only reflects and supports its meaning, but it also draws the reader into Caleb's world of indeterminacy and entraps him there. For the reader witnesses the crumbling of assumptions about the novel and about his relationship to it. Like subjective and objective experience, romance or The Adventures of Caleb Williams and reality or Things as They Are prove to be indistinguishable. Godwin achieves this confusion and subversion by his use of a first-person narrator whom he undermines, and by confusing past and present, memory and invention, historian and creator. He

abolishes all grounds for determining a definite meaning, for arriving at a definitive conclusion. Like Caleb, however, he discovers that trying to undermine a rigid structure--in his case, the structure of the novel--from within might ultimately subvert the form, but will inevitably destroy his own story in the process.

By establishing his central character as the narrator of the tale, Godwin immediately casts suspicion on the objectivity of the story; as Punter states, "it is impossible to establish objectivity with a first-person narrative" (139). Caleb commences his tale by saying, "I have not deserved this treatment. My own conscience witnesses in behalf of that innocence my pretensions to which are regarded in the world as incredible" (3). As the narrative continues, however, Caleb's opening assertions of his innocence, which he tries to convince his reader are true, become more rather than less questionable. Caleb's account, motivated by a desire to vindicate his own character, to recapture and perhaps to recreate his past, and inevitably, to destroy Falkland, cannot be expected to portray the facts accurately.

Furthermore, the character whom Godwin appoints as narrator appears untrustworthy. Caleb's fascination with romance narratives, his description of his means of recalling his past, his inventiveness, and his

"considerable facility in the art of imitation" (238) all suggest that in his memoirs Caleb fuses together his memory and imagination and thereby destroys all hope of distinguishing between history and fantasy. This uncertainty grows when one considers his statement that "My story will at least <u>appear</u> to have that consistency, which is seldom attendant but upon truth" [emphasis mine](3). One's suspicions are increased if not confirmed (for nothing is confirmed in this novel) by the excessive narrative privilege that Caleb claims in describing the malignant recesses of Tyrrel's mind (23) or the delirious thoughts that Emily experiences prior to her death (86). Contradictions between his claims of uncertainty or ignorance of a story and his omniscient relation of the same increase one's sense that he has filled the gaps in his knowledge with his imagination.

Evidence of Caleb's unbalanced perspective is apparent in the perverted logic of some of his claims: "To [Falkland's] story the whole fortune of my life was linked; because he was miserable, my happiness, my name, and my existence have been irretrievably blasted" (10);

> The feud that sprung up between [Falkland and Tyrrel] was nourished by concurring circumstances, till it attained a magnitude

> difficult to be paralleled; and, because they regarded each other with a deadly hatred, I have become an object of misery and abhorrence.
>
> (19)

These logical twists force one to question Caleb's mental processes; his contradictory statements and his tendency to ascribe unlikely coincidences to incriminating events encourage one to question his honesty. For during the fire at Falkland's Caleb states:

> I conceived that . . . I should contribute my personal labour in the public concern. I set out for that purpose; and my steps by some mysterious fatality were directed to the private apartment at the end of the library. . . . I forgot the business upon which I came, the employment of the servants and the urgency of general danger. I should have done the same, if the flames that seemed to extend as they proceeded, and already surmounted the house, had reached this very apartment. [emphasis mine]
>
> (131-32)

Not only does he avoid responsibility for his presence in the room, but he also makes a statement that he contradicts moments later when he tries to justify his behaviour:

> This was the first instance in which I had witnessed a danger by fire. All was confusion around me, and all changed into hurricane within. The general situation to my unpractised apprehension appeared desperate, and I by contagion became alike desperate.
>
> (133)

A similarly unlikely coincidence and justification occurs when Caleb unwittingly finds himself at the inn where Forester is staying (147). Such contradictions and seeming coincidences alert the reader to wonder what Caleb does not tell him.

Godwin's use of dramatic irony and intertextuality further subverts Caleb's reliability. As Rothstein makes clear in his chapter on Caleb Williams, Godwin and his narrator make extensive use of allusion and analogy. Their approach reveals a number of things about Caleb, Godwin's attitude towards him, and about the capacity of the narrative to convey the story. For "Caleb's analogies are modified by analogies he cannot detect, his rhetoric modified by inconsistencies hidden from him" (Rothstein 226). Caleb's imitative tendency reveals itself in his portrayal of Miss Melvile's conflict with Tyrrel; for this part of the novel is heavily indebted to Samuel

Richardson's Clarissa.[3] As with the tale about Brightwel, which Godwin marks with a footnote directing the reader to the Newgate Calendar, Godwin uses those allusions to undermine Caleb; for Caleb's account does not match the historic account:[4]

> [Caleb] clearly would like us to accept the parallel between the injured Brightwel and himself; and Godwin, even at the cost of weakening his attack on the penal system, clearly would like us to question that parallel.
>
> (Rothstein 219)

The analogical approach that the novel takes is readily apparent; one can almost make columns of characters whose stories echo one another. While this does reveal the way in which Caleb tries to seek an identity and to put himself into a larger framework, it also implies that a narrative conveying only a single strand might not have the appearance of authority and that it would not have as devastating an impact. For this novel is filled with isolated individuals like Caleb; he is not the only one to suffer from social injustice, incarceration, alienation or solipsism. By thus employing analogy as a technique for constructing the novel, Godwin manages to depict a world filled with isolated, despairing individuals, and to enable

the reader to examine it a thousand ways and thereby to discover its inconsistencies and ironies. He also makes his reader conscious of the underlying existence of other tales without giving him the opportunity to read them, in the same way that he gives characters vision without an accompanying capacity to act.

By making Caleb both character and narrator, Godwin splits Caleb into an experiencing and narrating, or past and present figure; such fragmentation is further complicated when one realizes that the narrative takes Caleb several years to write and that he cannot therefore be regarded as the same narrator from beginning to end. Towards the beginning of the novel, where he relates Falkland's youth as told him by Collins and thus feels not only distant, but also free to invent, Caleb feels some sense of control in keeping the two selves separate. Consequently, his style is fluid, formal and certain. As the past catches up to the present, however, and he tells his own story, he begins to realize that such control has evaded him. His style becomes increasingly abrupt, and is frequently punctuated with exclamations and question marks: when he decides to retaliate against Falkland's persecution he cries, "No, I will use no daggers! I will unfold a tale --! I will show thee for what thou art, and all the men that

live shall confess my truth! --" (314). In a sense, the narrator and the character act in a pattern of pursuer and pursued similar to that enacted by Caleb and Falkland. The narrator tries to recapture the character of the past while that past gradually overtakes the narrator in the present. The destruction of one results in the dissolution of the other. When past and present selves, or actor and writer, unite, the text that they form begins to disintegrate. Caleb begins to realize that he exists only within the narrative construct, which originates from his own mind. He loses his desire to write and begins to feel uncertain about his sanity:

> I have had no sleep. I have scarcely remained in one posture for a minute together. It has been with utmost difficulty that I have been able to command myself far enough to add a few pages to my story. But, uncertain as I am of the events of each succeeding hour, I determined to force myself to the performance of this task. All is not right with me. . . . I sometimes fear that I shall be wholly deserted of my reason.
>
> (313-14)

Such a statement undermines a reader's faith in Caleb's reliability as a narrator and prompts him to ask at

what point in Caleb's adventures Caleb began his tale. Because of the splitting of character and writer, one senses that there has been a series of selves composing these memoirs but can never be certain of who they were relative to the active selves; what was the narrator's state of mind at the moment of composition? By the final page, Caleb denies his original purpose in writing and abolishes the character of his past in declaring:

> I began these memoirs with the idea of vindicating my character. I have now no character that I wish to vindicate: but I will finish them that thy story may be fully understood; and that, if those errors of thy life be known which thou so ardently desired to conceal, the world may at least not hear and repeat a half-told and mangled tale.
>
> (326)

Because Godwin constantly undermines Caleb and his text, Caleb can never escape or reverse Falkland's curse, even by writing his memoirs; it seems instead as though Falkland articulates and thereby dictates Caleb's destiny; Caleb discovers he cannot overcome the story Falkland has created for him:[5]

> If once you fall, call as loud as you will, no man

> on earth shall hear your cries; prepare a tale however plausible, or however true, the whole world shall execrate you for an imposter. Your innocence shall be of no service to you.
>
> (153-54)

For although he is not condemned as he is in Godwin's original ending, he is still subject to his self-destructive prophecy: "The narrative I have taken the pains to digest will only perpetuate my shame and spread more widely the persuasion of my nefarious guilt!" (332)

When his attempt to recapture and to recreate his past unites with his present, Caleb learns what Derrida expresses in more theoretical terms: "We are dispossessed of the longed-for presence in the gesture of language by which we attempt to seize it" (141). Experience cannot be regained or altered through language; the past cannot be changed by the present. Therefore, a narrative, which necessarily uses language, cannot recapture inner experience. As past and present unite in his memoirs, Caleb realizes that he is trapped by his inability to return to his past, to change his present or to redefine himself.[6] As Hogle remarks,

> Whatever he does, Caleb is trapped and contradicted by the very symbols he chooses to

> render himself coherent. In fact, the symbols themselves are unable to stay within closed systems, skipping as they do across different chains of writing to the point of voiding any basis of meaning.
>
> (267)

Language tries to define, to establish meaning based on common assumptions; conscious of the invalidity of such assumptions, Caleb cannot adequately express himself.

Only Caleb's attempts to overcome the limitations of definitive language through his extensive use of symbolic and supernatural imagery and biblical language that present his experience in cosmic terms come close to capturing his psychological experience. As Kenneth Graham states, such images "help portray the physical and psychological violence of his novel's world that is forever forcing Godwin to challenge the expressive limits of language" (51). For symbolism and mythological allusion permit the expression of multiple levels of experience. Yet for the same reason that they aid in the expression of indescribable experiences, they also cast a mist over them; because such language operates on many levels, it refuses to remain fixed. As a result, Caleb communicates his unstable psychological experience by the approach he is

forced to take. However, because even the symbols he uses are based upon common social beliefs, he cannot completely escape from or transcend those social constructs which he knows to be illusory. His symbolic language thus reflects his own entrapment. He succeeds in rendering his reader conscious of the multiplicity of levels of his experience without enabling him to escape by establishing any single meaning or certainty that the language or symbolic meaning adequately conveys Caleb's experience.

This difficulty with language extends beyond a desire to escape social structures into the realm of the capacity of language to express deep emotional experiences. Ong claims that

> [t]he highly interiorized stages of consciousness in which the individual is not so immersed unconsciously in communal structures are stages which, it appears, consciousness would never reach without writing.
>
> (178)

However, as Todorov states, "To designate feelings, to verbalize thoughts, is to change them" (PP 95). Godwin, like Caleb, is stuck with the Word; no other structuring device is available for expression, and therefore the author, like the narrator, cannot be certain

that his expression is self-expression. Godwin, Caleb and the reader remain incarcerated within their consciousness of uncertainty and inadequacy.

Godwin demonstrates that all relevant experience cannot be collected in one authoritative narrator,[7] that one cannot recreate oneself by writing, and that the attempt to affect one's destiny through the creative assertion of one's will is merely a "wild-goose chase" embarked on by poets and philosophers (30). One realizes by the end of the novel that there are no "facts", only subjective accounts; Godwin presents only one side of the story, but other sides would not clarify or establish "facts". His ironic subversion of Caleb's reliability and his undermining of the basis of the entire text suggests an undermining of all earthly authority, including himself as author. No single truth given by any single authority is possible; all one can hope for is subjective "truth". Thus, the presence with which the reader is left, the text of Caleb Williams, serves only to subvert its own authority and to emphasize the absence of any other. The reader remains trapped within his consciousness of such an absence and his inability to compensate for it.

Chapter Three

The "Uncommunicable Condition"

As do The Monk and Caleb Williams, Melmoth the Wanderer addresses entrapment both inside and outside of social systems. In this novel, Charles Maturin emphasizes the distinctions between the kinds of entrapment experienced by both conformists and non-conformists or transgressors, by focussing on their attitudes towards the significance of formal presence or surfaces. Those who purchase a membership in society do so by sharing a concern for the forms of things, and a disregard for underlying content. They concentrate, therefore, on maintaining appearances, playing their assigned roles, obeying the institutional representatives of religion and believing that truth lies in the forms of words. Characters who decline such a membership because they seek meaning beneath the forms promoted by authorities are individualistic and thoughtful; theirs is an unstable, inarticulate, and often formless world. Maturin allies himself with this group and, as the self-ironic construction of the novel, which nevertheless retains its form as a text, reveals, he is frustrated as they are by an inability to effect a release

from social, literary or linguistic structures. By drawing his reader into the text, forcing him to participate, and putting him in a position analogous both to that of a character and to that of a co-author, Maturin creates an environment in which the reader, author and characters become imprisoned within the romance.

For Maturin's characters, life in the thinking, human world, of which they all become inmates, can only be painful and binding. Their choices in life are limited to two. They may accept the role defined for them by their families, religions, and the customs of their countries, and thereby attain the benevolence of social authorities; characters who do this include the Director, Monçada's and Isadora's parents, and the Catholics surrounding the Guzman family. Otherwise, as Stanton, Monçada, Isadora, Melmoth and the Wanderer do,[1] they may rebel against those roles and customs to pursue their own visions of a truth beyond that which is dictated to them. Either choice is restricting and exacts an enormous psychological price. As Lougy suggests, Maturin presents a pessimistic view of perpetual and inescapable misery:

> The world for [Maturin] is an abode that constantly tempts and threatens its inhabitants. Madness, sickness, and death seem to be its

> predominant characteristics, and happiness is most often a fleeting and transient gossamer that few succeed in capturing.
>
> (38)

Conformity to hierarchically-imposed rules and attitudes offers the security of belonging to society and often grants some socially recognized power over others as it does for Fra José and the Director, but it also requires a sacrifice of one's will. This involves a submission to and acceptance of mindlessness, monotony, superficiality, and rigidity. One becomes an automaton: as the monks and Elinor's aunt reveal, even religious worship is reduced to hourly prayers repeated according to routine. To Monçada, who is forced to adopt a passive role and to rely on his brother and a parricide monk to facilitate his release from the monastery, the mechanical responses that are inherent in conforming characters represent the worst prison:

> The moment life is put beyond the reach of your will, and placed under the influence of mechanical operations, it becomes, to thinking beings, a torment insupportable.
>
> (85)

Although Monçada is put in this position against his will, Maturin suggests that most people are locked into this

category because "the harness of art [is] upon every limb and feature from their birth" (251) and because they are taught both to conform and to accept authority passively; as a result, they lose their ability to understand those who do not behave according to such customs, and they do not dream of transgressing them themselves; in her letter to her husband, Donna Clara demonstrates this inability:

> Donna Clara proceeded to relate sundry other errors and wanderings of her daughter, which, to a mind so swathed, crippled, and dwarfed, by the ligatures which the hand of custom had twined round it since its first hour of consciousness, might well have appeared like the aberrations of insanity.
>
> (291)

Even the priests who appear to manipulate their subjects are, according to the narrator, victims of a system whose power's "influence is unlimited, indefinable, and unknown, even to those who exercise it" (170). All mindless participants in the system are victims, even if they also function as oppressors. Thus, as in Lewis's novel, there are degrees of victimization, and as in both Lewis's and Godwin's romances, regardless of what position one

occupies, one is bound to the cyclical power structure of oppressor and victim.[2]

Passive acceptance of authority and of the status quo results from such indoctrination and from the sacrifice of one's will. To custom-formed people, the world is straightforward: patriarchical figures in the family and the Church hold all necessary authority; as holders of the story, they impose and enforce laws and morals which others must receive as right. Thus, all the characters who exist within the social construct are at a similar level of ignorance: as Adonijah remarks to Monçada, "those who had the teaching of thy youth not only have shut the book of knowledge to thee, but have forgotten to open it for themselves" (203). As a result, many characters accept the Church's interpretation of a Bible they have never read; Donna Clara even permits Father José to dictate her letters to her husband: "'Holy Father, you shall judge for me in everything'" (385).

Blind acceptance of authority destroys selfhood; for it precludes the exercise of individual moral responsibility. Thus we see characters who take no responsibility for their own actions, but instead sacrifice others as a form of expiation for their own transgressions. Monçada's mother offers a prime example; she feels

obligated not only to hand over control over her own life to the Director, but also to follow his advice and to sacrifice her illegitimate first-born to the Church to expiate her own guilt for a past error just as Agnes's superstitious parents sacrifice her in The Monk. Not only does she avoid responsibility, she also denies the Christian sacrifice and places the institution of the Church above the spirit of God; as Moncada says, " . . . how false is a treaty made with God, which we ratify with our own blood, when he has declared there is but one sacrifice he will accept . . . " (73). According to Moncada, the mentality which encourages one to submit and to surrender all control over one's life is difficult to resist under certain circumstances:

> When a powerful agency is thus exercised on us,--when another undertakes to think, feel, and act for us, we are delighted to transfer to him, not only our physical, but our moral responsibility. (141)

However, as Stanton discovers, passive obedience and blind faith do not facilitate release from imprisonment (40). In Melmoth, although characters who consistently respond unquestioningly and unimaginatively to life do influence the course of protagonists' lives, they remain in the

background of the narratives and beneath, if not explicitly Maturin's, at least the Wanderer's contempt: for the Wanderer dismisses the thought of victimizing Isadora's father, Don Francisco di Aliaga, because he is no more than "a withered scrap of orthodoxy" (339).

The concern with formal presence associated with acceptance of hierarchical structures is reflected both in the relationship between power and language and in the function of that language. The implication that those with power also control language pervades the entire novel. In considering his relationship with his family, Don Francisco describes himself as "author of their fortunes," "authoritative," and deserving of both "respect and devotion" (302-03). His superiority is reflected in both his letters and his wife's. Isadora's father employs highly artificial language filled with Latin quotations; as his condescending tone implies, the function of language is not primarily to communicate but to reinforce a sense of his superiority over his wife: "I have recovered a daughter . . . as it were, e faucibus Draconis -- e profundis Barathri -- the which terms Fra José will make plain to your weaker comprehension" (283). Donna Clara's reply must be dictated to her by Fra José. In keeping with these signs of power, Isadora, to whose role no power is

attached, is expected to demonstrate "perfect obedience, profound submission, and unbroken silence . . . " (253). Donna Clara's belief in the connection of power, language and thought imprisons her in ignorance and submission, for she believes that profound thought accompanies diffuse rhetoric like her husband's. She is therefore relieved that Isadora shows no threatening signs of subversive individuality and thought: "She talks little, therefore she cannot think much" (290). As Maturin reveals, this connection is misguided; Don Francisco has few thoughts whereas his daughter has many. Thus, in the hands of authority figures, language is used to impose social power on others and to deceive; it does not serve to create a sense of community based on understanding and shared feelings, but is essentially divisive and meaningless.

Other characters experience emptiness in the roles appointed to them, but refuse to follow external direction or to accept the monotony of conformity. Conscious of gaps in their experience, of an absence of meaning in the lives dictated to them, and of a need to know or have more, they seek some deeper meaning, the recovery of a memory, the freedom to exercise their will, or simply a change: as a dying monk tells Moncada, "The monotony of my existence would make a transition, even to pain, desirable" (85).

This desirable transition from monotony into pain is, as his position shows, a transition into both life and death. These people reject the assumption that the domination of the individual by custom is natural. In a world in which victimization seems unavoidable, "[they] would be [their] own victim[s] ten thousand times sooner than [anyone else's]" (297). They prefer to take charge of their lives, to act for themselves and to try to change their destinies despite the high costs of alienation, the vengeful pursuit by previously benevolent authorities, and personal frustration and guilt.

Although most of these characters are dependent upon the resources of those to whom they are opposed, they all tend to be self-sustaining; they find themselves isolated by their desire to assert their will or to fill the gaps in their existence, and they often prefer to be alone. Melmoth is dependent upon his uncle and is essentially isolated both inside and outside his family; his uncle imprisons himself with his obsessive hoarding which inevitably leads to paranoia. Likewise, Stanton wanders alone in a foreign country where nobody speaks his language or agrees with his religious views. The expressed or enacted desire to find something beyond mundane mindlessness often sends such characters into even greater

depths of isolation and alienation as those conforming to hierarchical structures, threatened by self-assertion, marginalize the nonconformists in madhouses, monastic vaults, and cells of the Inquisition; confinement in desperate circumstances results in a movement into the depths of the self that can serve as an initiation into despair and madness. Such depths coincide with the appearance of the Wanderer. As Moncada discovers, acts directed towards freeing oneself from the bonds of social custom or authority are not necessarily accompanied by welcome results:

> Even in the Inquisition I belonged to somebody, - I was watched and guarded; - now, I was the outcast of the whole earth, and I wept with equal bitterness and depression at the hopeless vastness of the desert I had to traverse.
>
> (92-3)

By acknowledging an individual's existence, even in a negative way, society grants a sense of belonging in a definite category; even that negative identity is lost when one travels too far into the labyrinth of the self. The double-edged pursuits transgressing characters engage themselves in require thought, passion, and consciousness, all of which Maturin associates with guilt, pain, fear, and

despair.

Furthermore, the author makes it clear that the object of one's pursuit, be it freedom, knowledge, the fulfilment of passion, a lost paradise, or a new authority or god, is both questionable and elusive. For Monçada purchases his freedom from the monastery by entering into an inescapable bond with one whom he abhors above all others, and Stanton's quest to know the Wanderer as Jacob sought to know God remains unsatisfied:

> It is very singular that at this moment, when his imagination had reached its highest pitch of elevation, - when the object he had pursued so long and fruitlessly, had in one moment become as it were tangible to the grasp of both mind and body, - when this spirit, with whom he had wrestled in darkness, was at last about to declare its name, that Stanton began to feel a disappointment at the futility of his pursuits.
>
> (33)

Obsessive pursuits like Stanton's for knowledge or experience enslave the character, becoming both his "master-passion" and his "master-torment" (44), and he finds himself locked into a cycle that plunges him into deeper despair, a cycle from which he cannot escape.

Moncada experiences frustrations similar to Stanton's. Although it appears as if Moncada has a goal towards which he is propelling himself, that goal, freedom, grows increasingly indefinite and elusive; he enters a cycle in which his hopes are repeatedly raised and smashed. This constant arousal and disappointment at the "futility of his pursuits" eventually sends him into increasing depths of despair, uncertainty and imprisonment. In his constant participation in this cycle, Moncada fulfills Stanton's definition of madness:

> . . . [madmen] are revived every morning by some delicious illusion of cunning madness, soothing them with the hope of escaping, baffling or tormenting their keeper; . . . sanity precludes all such hope.
>
> (43)

Despite all of his attempts, Moncada can do no more than enter new prisons of monotony. Even narration proves unhelpful; for he tells his story many times--in a memorial, to the Bishop, to the Inquisition, and finally to Melmoth--just as Lewis does in his structure, but his memories, his consciousness, and his isolation in the world remain unalleviated. Burke's description of such repetition as a form of madness reinforces the impression

of Monçada that Stanton's definition gives:

> . . . [madmen] remain whole days and nights, sometimes whole years, in the constant repetition of some remark, some complaint, or song . . . and the hurry of their spirits, unrestrained by the curb of reason, continues it to the end of their lives.
>
> (Burke 74)

Isadora's curiosity and her desire to be initiated into the thinking world are transformed into a desire for escape from that world of custom and consciousness: "Let me lose all feeling of my present existence, or all memory of the past!" (261). However, like Monçada's, her desire to flee is countered by a knowledge that she has nowhere to run to. She is faced with the dilemma of wanting to escape from a known pain but realising that the world into which she runs is unknown and uncertain:

> All that day she thought how it was possible to liberate herself from her situation, while the feeling that liberation was impossible clung to the bottom of her heart;
>
> (284)
>
> . . . her escape was completely barred; and had every door in the house been thrown open, she

> would have felt like a bird on its first flight from the cage, without a spray that she dared to rest on.
>
> (285)

Like Byron's Manfred, these characters, particularly the Wanderer, who shares both Manfred's Faustian yearnings and his destiny, suffer from an acute awareness of themselves and of their destinies. Stanton "has the curse of sanity, and of memory" (34) within a madhouse; "[he] know[s] [he] never can escape" (43). Monçada is always acutely aware of his mental and physical imprisonment and his desire to achieve freedom--even when he recognizes that he is being manipulated, he also knows that he cannot free himself; Isadora also experiences the inner struggle between a hope for the possibility of escape and the knowledge of its impossibility (284). Once attained, consciousness is like an inescapable mental torture chamber. Milton's words describing Satan articulate the unavoidable anguish that some characters in Melmoth experience: "which way shall I flie / Infinite wrauth, and infinite despaire? / Which way I flie is hell; my self am Hell" (PL Bk IV, 73-5).

Throughout this novel, Maturin makes it difficult, if not impossible for his characters to establish any grounds of certainty; he keeps them in what Lougy terms "the

twilight regions of human life, between waking and sleeping, between the conscious and unconscious" (28). One consequence is that they seek and eventually are willing to grasp at any sign of possible authority. To create a sense of indeterminacy, the author confuses the boundaries between right and wrong, between pursuer and pursued, and between victim and tormentor in a manner similar to Lewis's and Godwin's. Monçada, for example, discovers that in his position as victim, he, like Caleb, is capable of wielding the power of a tyrant and of making the guilty suffer for their own transgressions:

> Suddenly my mind changed. I felt - what was it I felt? - a union of malignity, despair, and power, the most formidable. Lightning seemed flashing from my eyes as I reflected, - I might make the sacrificers and the sacrificed change places in one moment, - I might blast my mother as she stood, by a word, - I might break my father's heart, by a single sentence, - I might scatter more desolation around me, than was apparently possible for human vice, human power, or human malignity, more potent than both, to cause to its most abject victim.
>
> (73)

This revolt of the victim against his oppressor marks the initiation into self-consciousness as the victim suddenly recognizes his potential power. Juan, like Frankenstein's creature and Caleb Williams, shocks his creator when he gains consciousness and turns into the Director's enemy (96).

Even that which promises to be stable is not, for this novel is full of reversals and foiled expectations. One position can and does frequently change into its opposite. Like Antonia in The Monk and Caleb in Caleb Williams, Monçada discovers that in the sublime world of knowledge and guilt the only God possible is a vengeful one; the transition into that world witnesses a transformation like that in which the Director changes "from a ministering angel to an infuriated and menacing demon" (63). Ultimately, everyone plays both the role of victim and that of victimizer, sometimes even tormenting others in his or her desperate attempts to escape tyranny, as Monçada does to the Jew who shelters him and as Walberg does to his senile father. Thus, Maturin simultaneously portrays characters as central and marginal, and as active and passive. This instability, combined with the compromise of previously absolute moral values that occurs in desperate circumstances, forces characters to make individual,

possibly irrational and indefensible decisions. In such an uncertain world, then, it is not surprising that upon finding himself between the Wanderer and the Inquisitors, Moncada declares a need for certainty that supersedes all moral considerations:

> I felt myself surrounded by enemies on every side, and would have given my heart to those who would first throw off the mask, and announce themselves as my decided and avowed enemy.
>
> (179)

Whereas silence implies emptiness, submission and absence for those accepting the system, for those outside that society, silence means not the absence but the presence of meaning and thought. To nonconformists, language appears empty of meaning; the Wanderer suggests that as an intermediary between thought or self and the experience or other, it serves only to deceive: "If it is into [men's] thoughts you wish to look, you must see them expressed by their actions. In their dealings with each other, men are generally deceitful" (224). Silence is better able to express profound feeling:

> This is the marked gradation of profound feeling. Language is no longer necessary to those whose beating hearts converse audibly . . . to whom, in

> the exquisite inversion of earthly feeling and habit, darkness is light, and silence eloquence. (277)

Those whose actions result in guilt discover another eloquence in silence: that of an accusing conscience. For these characters, unlike those within society, take responsibility for their own guilt, sacrificing, as the parricide monk does, their own peace of mind in unending expiation:

> . . . there is not so bitter a reproach on earth as silence, for it always seems to refer the guilty to their own hearts, whose eloquence seldom fails to fill up the pause very little to the satisfaction of the accused. (172)

Thus, for those outside society, the absence of language is indicative of the presence of significance.

Rosemary Jackson's claim that the inversion of the romantic quest structure in fantasy results in that pursuit being "twisted into a circular journey to nowhere, ending in the same darkness with which it opened, remaining unenlightened" (101) can certainly be applied to this novel. For ultimately, Maturin suggests that regardless of what a character does, he does not have the power to change

his destiny. Blind faith and the exertion of one's will prove equally futile in securing a positive outcome: in the first instance, the inner self, represented by the will, is sacrificed; in the second, the peace of mind accompanying a lack of self-consciousness is lost. One senses that the author's view of life is one in which man's experience will always remain incomplete and unsatisfactory. If he either accepts that or does not realize it, he will function as an insignificant cog in a mechanistic, monotonous society; however, if he struggles against it, he will encounter nothing but frustration in his futile pursuits.

Thematically, this implies that a higher authority predetermines an inevitable course which no act of mortal will can alter; regardless of how much effort one exerts, one cannot escape being entrapped within one's monotonous mortal existence. Upon entering life one is destined for death; one cannot be liberated from the pain of one without encountering the darkness of the other: "[man] must be a prisoner every step that [he] takes" (143). Consciousness of this inevitability even as one struggles against it only increases the pain. As Isadora's tranquil statue of the madonna whose calm smile seems cold to Isadora's inner turmoil suggests, not only is man destined to suffer in either case, but he is also subject to mockery from the

tranquil and hopeless aspect of

> . . . the divinity, smiling on the misery it neither consoles or relieves, and intimating in that smile the profound and pulseless apathy of inaccessible elevation, coldly hinting that humanity must cease to be, before it can cease to suffer.
>
> (261)

From a literary perspective, of course, this inability to change one's destiny makes perfect sense, because the author orchestrates his plots and his characters to suit the purpose of his novel. Theoretically, the author's position as the ultimate manipulator forces the reader to side either with the author or with the characters; in actuality, however, it shifts the reader from one position to the other throughout the novel, preventing him from considering himself as either co-author or co-participant for more than a moment.

Even as he concentrates on the psychological imprisonment experienced by isolated individuals, Maturin tries to reinforce a sense of a community of sufferers bound within the text and represented by the Wanderer. He suggests that all of the Wanderer's victims' destinies are bound by "a link, wondrous, invisible, and indissoluble"

(208). Thus, Maturin shifts the terms of reference in the novel, making the margins central. As a result, the characters whose consciousness of some absence in their lives removes them to the periphery of society--those people whose presence society tries to ignore, suppress, or otherwise make absent--are recentred by Maturin. Is this attempt to recentre and thereby to create a community successful in overcoming the overwhelming sense of individual isolation in the novel? In the final analysis, no. Ultimately, Maturin removes all hope of community by implying that the only way one can go on and retain one's ability to function as an individual is to reject all offers of relief from other sources, as all of the Wanderer's victims do in rejecting his proposal. As the Wanderer tells Melmoth and Monçada, "the secret of my destiny rests with me" (408); each person must face his own destiny alone.

One must then wonder whether the community of tales within Maturin's text is any more viable. Adonijah claims that a bond joining individual destinies exists within his manuscript; Maturin tries to create a similar community of outsiders within his text centred on the figure of the Wanderer. Does he succeed in creating a sense of unity? Kathleen Fowler argues that the novel is unified by means

of the presence of the Wanderer, and by recurrent images, myths and themes, including those of despair and entrapment (522). The implied presence of John Melmoth reading and listening to the tales that relate to his ancestor also ties the narratives together. However, the fact that the Wanderer who ostensibly acts as the focus of this novel is, for the most part, absent, appearing only momentarily to present his proposal to his victims is significant: it suggests the absence of the community he supposedly represents. Furthermore, the constantly shifting narrators, the disjunction and inconclusiveness of the tales, and the sense that the manuscript or the text is dissolving before one's eyes remind the reader that while both the characters and their tales "are all beads on the same string" (229), the thread holding them together is a tenuous one, and the union is only indissoluble because the tales exist within the same textual framework. Although the novel consists of a complex series of stories linked by common factors of obsession, despair, suffering and the appearance of the Wanderer, these stories remain fragmented and isolated; their presence within the same text and the same context may hold them in a relationship but it is only a loose relationship. Therefore, each tale, like each victim it describes, must stand alone. If one extends this

view, one can see that Maturin's text is in the same position. Despite its use of references and allusions, it remains isolated within its literary context and will be evaluated on the basis of its own creative energy.

Maturin's remarkable self-consciousness as a writer manifests itself in his constant attempts to remind or inform the reader of the literary and historical contexts of the events in his novel, particularly when he describes Stanton's trips to the theatre and the history of the Mortimer family. This quality is also apparent in his reminders of the relationships of the various tales within the framing narrative, and in his editorial comments about art, reality, and language. In one instance, aware that many readers do not distinguish between the author and his narrator, he makes that distinction clear in a disclaimer:

> I must here trespass so far on the patience of the reader as to assure him that the sentiments ascribed to the stranger are diametrically opposed to mine, and that I have purposely put them into the mouth of an agent of the enemy of mankind.
>
> (233)

He also makes explicit mythical underpinnings such as that of the fall of man: "[Isadora] had, indeed, tasted of the

tree of knowledge, and her eyes were opened, but its fruit was bitter to her taste" (236). Some of this self-consciousness about his literary antecedents also shows his tendency to reflect in his novel the characteristics of oral traditions in which borrowing from other tales was assumed (Ong 133). By drawing his reader's attention to the intertextuality of his novel, Maturin tries to escape from the isolating, enclosing bonds of the published text.

Although all of his editorial details suggest that Maturin is affirming the authority of his novel, closer examination reveals that this self-consciousness marks his affinity with his conscious and therefore rebellious characters, and that, in fact, he is structurally and stylistically undermining his own authority as well as that of preceding texts.

As Maturin's interest in and sympathy for the Wanderer and his fellow sufferers reflects, the writer, particularly the romance writer, rebels against his designated role in society and seeks to understand and convey something beyond ordinary life. The processes of writing this novel as author and of trying to unravel it as reader are in many ways akin to the elusive search witnessed in Maturin's characters. For in exploring beyond the limits of ordinary experience and delving into the labyrinths of the human

psyche at its darkest moments, the author himself crosses into a dangerous isolation in which he is both the possessor of and possessed by the irrational elements in his art. The reader, who is initiated into these dark secrets by the act of reading the novel, accompanies him.[3]

In Orality and Literacy, contrasting manuscripts with printed documents or books, Walter J. Ong claims that manuscripts are better able to unite an author and his reader:

> . . . glosses or marginal comments (which often got worked into the text in subsequent copies) were in dialogue with the world outside their own borders. They remained closer to the give-and-take of oral expression. The readers of manuscripts are less closed off from the author, less absent, than are the readers of those writing for print.
>
> (132)

By interspersing manuscripts that are either read or memorized with oral narratives within the textual bounds of his novel, Maturin seems to be trying to create a community of readers, and a closer bond between the author and his readership--trying to overcome the isolating nature of the printed word. The numerous gaps in the manuscripts he

describes are also present in the text itself. Maturin's attempt to force the reader to place himself in a position analogous to John Melmoth's is manifest in his writing the novel as if it were a manuscript. The reader acts both as co-author, as he tries to fill in the spaces with meaning, and as co-participant, pursuing an elusive absolute. In either case, he does so alone, with only an incomplete text as a guide.

Throughout his journey into Maturin's labyrinthine narrative structure, the reader tries to untangle webs of interconnected tales to arrive at its underlying "truths" or meanings. However, this attempt to understand the novel is complicated by shifts in narrative layers, in points of view, in style and in time. The novel opens with a partially-omniscient narrator observing John Melmoth, enters his mind as he meditates upon a story told him by a sybil, then shifts to Stanton's narrative within a tattered manuscript, which also holds a tale told by a superstitious woman and excerpts from an "album of a madhouse" (36), both of which, one must remember, have been recalled and written down by Stanton years later. The original narrator then cuts in to introduce the most prominent narrator, Alonzo Moncada. Within Moncada's narrative, most of which he has memorized from a manuscript he transcribed, are embedded

numerous stories told by a writer who collects tales, and by the Wanderer himself. One must constantly reevaluate the sanity and position of the speaker. Monçada, for example, who narrates most of the novel and frequently editorializes, fulfills Stanton's definition of madness; furthermore, his view is obviously extremely subjective and therefore selective. Much of his narrative describes his own experiences and, as he admits, in transcribing and telling the other tales, he becomes "the recorder of [his] own condemnation" (207); their stories are his own. Robert Kiely concludes:

> By means of first person narratives, Maturin attempts to explore the minds of his victimized characters, tracing their course from a state of physical sensation, to a keen but highly subjective observation of detail, to an increasingly distorted sense of external reality, and finally to a point of inventiveness which recreates an imaginary world more distinct and affective than the world of objective reality. (193)

The reader is therefore faced with a dilemma similar to that which presents itself to Monçada when he must decide whether or not to trust his brother Juan, whose

obsessiveness and strange behaviour suggests that he might be mad (141). The narrative itself is also questionable; the authenticity of numerous narratives, including that of the writer who meets Imogen's father at the inn, is qualified: "Such was the tale told by the old, who affected to remember the facts, - and believed by the young, whose imagination supplied all the defects of memory . . . " (306). By forcing one to question the authority of his narrators, Maturin undermines the veracity of his own text. The constant shifting through various layers of narration changes the distance between the reader and the narrative, preventing him from gaining a foothold at any particular level.

The style and approach Maturin employs changes part of the way through the novel. Until Monçada begins relating the Tale of the Indians, the novel is extremely fragmented both stylistically and structurally. The reader is challenged to follow John Melmoth back and forth through time, in and out of Stanton's illegible manuscript, and to try to create a coherent picture from a series of disjointed, improbable tales. The reader, like Melmoth, is increasingly overcome by a "feverish thirst of curiosity" (44) and seeks to learn more by hearing more stories. Maturin's style throughout this section is as disruptive as

are the blanks in Stanton's manuscript. For the author tends to make extensive use of dashes in his sentence structure and, on occasion, to leave sentences unfinished:

> The stranger, slowly turning round, and disclosing a countenance which -- (Here the manuscript was illegible for a few lines), said in English--(A long hiatus followed here...).--. (23)

By fragmenting his narrative, Maturin arouses the reader's curiosity and forces him to participate in both the creation and the deciphering of the narrative.

In the second part, when Monçada begins reciting from a memorized manuscript, Maturin seems to adopt a more conventional approach and style. Monçada acts as a partially-omniscient narrator, offering editorial commentary as well as facts that no one but the Wanderer himself could know: "One generous, one human feeling, throbbed in [the Wanderer's] veins, and thrilled in his heart" (281). Having drawn his reader into the narrative, the author lulls him into a false sense of security in the narrator's authority by permitting fewer interruptions and utilizing a smoother, more assertive style. This sense of certainty is suddenly disrupted when Maturin abandons his reader in the middle of his labyrinth without any real answers. For Monçada promises to explain the rest of the

contents of Adonijah's manuscript and the tale of his escape which, he says, are "of a character still darker and more awful than those he had recited" (406); but he neglects to do so. Instead, he reintroduces the framing narrator who quickly concludes the novel with a description of the Wanderer's brief appearance in and mysterious disappearance from the framing story. The novel is conventionally concluded by a privileged narrator, who narrates the Wanderer's dream, but the novel nevertheless lacks closure. Maturin's stylistic shifts are means by which he manipulates his reader's response so that the reader is uncertain of his role relative to the characters and the author in reading the novel; he may initially believe that he is an active participant, but learns that he is both co-creator and co-victim.

With temporal shifts, Maturin simultaneously displaces his reader, preventing him from feeling comfortable in a conventionally sequential narrative, and undermines the spatial organization of his printed text. Throughout the novel, Maturin swings backward and forward in time until the reader begins to feel lost in time; upon entering the novel, one seems to enter not Immalee's timelessness of innocence, but the Wanderer's timelessness of despair and of a heightened consciousness of the universal human

condition of perpetual despair. When Isadora elopes with the Wanderer, the constant and confusing time shifts are disorienting. After presenting the letter that Don Fernando writes describing his vision, and after describing Isadora and the Wanderer's union, Monçada declares: "We have now to retrace a short period of our narrative to the night on which [the vision appeared]" (302). At the conclusion of this digression, which includes numerous other tales, Monçada jumps back to the day following the wedding.

This confusion is compounded by Maturin's inconsistent references to dates.[4] These inconsistencies, I suggest, are both part of the author's manipulation or victimization of the reader and a means of textual subversion. For by giving dates by which to measure the progress of the Wanderer's travels, Maturin implies that something definite underlies the narrative's movement; dates, like language, give one a sense of certainty because both claim to signify the intangible. Having created a sense of temporal definition and limitation, Maturin abolishes it; the inconsistency of his dates and the years that the novel covers destroys the assumption that measured time adequately represents the experience of time and reminds the reader that dates are merely human constructs without

any absolute authority to define an intangible element of experience. Thus, although this novel appears to have some certainty even underneath the shifting times, it lacks even that. It leaves the reader in a purgatory of uncertainty, sharing the ironic existence of the Wanderer who sought immortality and received a kind of tortured life-in-death from which he wished only release.

The indeterminacy caused by such shifts in point of view, style, and time is intensified by the incompleteness of Maturin's tales: for conversations are constantly interrupted, letters and manuscripts are illegible, or the speaker simply decides that his experience is too horrifying to relate. Thus Monçada's description of the torments he suffers before the Bishop's arrival suddenly breaks off: "This was not enough. I was deluged almost to suffocation with aspersions of holy water. Then followed, &c. --" (129). Often the most important part of a story, a victim's conversation with the Wanderer, is absent. By focusing the reader's attention on gaps in his text, Maturin stresses his own inadequacy of expression and subverts the authority of his own text. Maturin refuses to allow his text to grant the reader the authority and finality that a reader expects from a novel; instead he draws attention to his text's indeterminacy and to the

general inadequacy of romance literature in conveying powerful emotions; as Moncada tells Melmoth:

> 'Romances have made your country, Sir, familiar with tales of subterranean passages, and supernatural horrors. All these, painted by the most eloquent pen, must fall short of the breathless horror felt by a being engaged in an enterprise beyond his powers, experience, or calculation . . . '
>
> (148)

In remarking on his inability to express the whole story adequately, the writer destroys all firm ground. Although Maturin acts as the ultimate source, even he cannot reveal the entire tale; he serves as an editor rather than as an omniscient observer. Maturin promotes this view of himself as an editor with limited vision; at one point, where Moncada's whispers to Melmoth are unrecorded, Maturin inserts a footnote in which he appears to fill in the gaps with speculation:

> We do not venture to guess at the horrors of this whisper, but as every one conversant with ecclesiastical history knows, that Tetzel offered indulgences in Germany, even on the condition that the sinner had been guilty of the impossible

crime of violating the mother of God.

(124)

The reader is therefore left with very little substance to cling to; as a result, omissions encourage the reader to hold on to whatever information the narrator does provide in the hope that it will be definitive. Gaps and uncertainties invite the conscious reader to pursue a deeper understanding of the novel's elusive "truth", but they also suggest that there is no authoritative author behind the text, that no truth or satisfactory conclusion is possible. Thus, although the gaps encourage the reader to adopt the role of co-author, the reader finds himself in the same predicament as the characters--wandering in an uncertain environment pursuing a goal he realizes is unattainable; for no matter how hard one tries to fill in the gaps, the text remains in its permanent published form with the spaces ever present.

In his use of and emphasis upon language in this novel, Maturin seems to draw the reader's attention to the efficacy of that language; however, upon examining the nature of that use and that emphasis, the reader quickly realizes that, for Maturin, articulated language is an inadequate tool for expression of profound feeling or meaning. The author introduces many languages into the

novel, many of which must be transcribed or translated either by the editor, or by Monçada: in Adonijah's manuscript, Spanish has been transcribed into Greek characters, and must be retranscribed into Roman letters; the Jew communicates with a code of a sort, quoting passages from the Old Testament; and the Wanderer travels to numerous countries in which different languages prevail. Language changes, like temporal and spatial shifts, occur frequently throughout the novel; however necessary the "translations" might be merely to establish a continuous and accessible text, language changes are significant, partly because the writer draws attention to them, but more importantly because they provide a means by which Maturin simultaneously victimizes his reader and subverts the authority of his text and the language which creates it.

For as editor, the framing narrator essentially functions as a translator, interpreting the meaning implicit in one language and transcribing it into another. Because with the exception of common nouns referring to familiar, universal objects, no single language is really capable of conveying exactly the meaning of the same word in another, the reader is inevitably forced to depend upon the fictional editor's interpretation of the stories. Moreover, Maturin ensures that the reader is conscious of

his reliance upon the editor's intepretation. Even as the reader becomes conscious of his enforced passivity, he is tortured further by the awareness that the authority of the framing narrator has been undermined; for he does not know if, like readers of the Bible who translate the words of love into those of hate (236), the framing narrator is recovering or casting a shadow over the tales, or if he is recovering them for the reader. If a reader accepts the text, as he must because it is all he has, he is placed in the position of consciously accepting another person's interpretation of a book he can never read in its original form. Thus, Maturin puts the reader in the same dilemma as his characters; so when Monçada says, "I felt ultimately that I was in the power of all I dreaded most, and must submit to the operation of that power for my liberation" (141), the reader can sympathize with him. Maturin simultaneously puts himself in the position of an authority figure, victimizes his reader, and divests himself of all authority, thereby leaving the reader without anything concrete to hang on to.

As Leighton notes (148), language is a social construct; because language's ability to establish communities implies its capacity to alienate people from those communities, language is a means of differentiation

and separation as well as one of communication. Both Stanton's isolation in Italy and the Guzmans' isolation in Spain arise from both cultural (religious) and linguistic differences: the Guzmans are excluded because "[t]hey [are] strangers, and . . . ignorant of the language of the country. . . . They [are] also heretics" (319). Not surprisingly, Maturin seems to take a rather cynical view of language's capacity for true communication and complete unification; even in a social group, men use language only to deceive and to create superficial images of themselves. Those bound to social convention and the structures of language, those who believe that there might be a universal, articulated language, are the Indians who cannot understand the language Immalee speaks and who believe that it must therefore be "the language of the gods" (214), and the priests who cannot decode Adonijah's manuscript. Maturin discredits them. To him, the only possible universal language, the only truly bonding and communal language, is that of silence; for once a complete understanding has been reached, language is no longer necessary.

The languages whose effectiveness Maturin acknowledges in the novel are primarily inarticulate ones: the accusing language of the guilty heart, the language of

despair that no one dares to understand, the eloquence of dead tongues in manuscripts, the language of music, the language of tears and the silent language of nature:

> Alas! how deceitful and inadequate we feel the language of man. . . . What a difference between words without meaning, and that meaning without words, which the sublime phenomena of nature . . . convey to those who have 'ears to hear.' How eloquent of truth is nature in her very silence! (246)

As Walberg's outburst suggests, the unspoken seems to wield the greatest power: "Oh that is the bitterst of curses, - and it is felt most when it is least uttered!" (329). The most striking thing about the Wanderer's proposal is its incommunicability; the unspoken condition "is so full of horror and impiety, that, even to listen to it, is scarce less a crime than to comply with it!" (326). Its strong presence, paradoxically derived from its absence, communicates passions of terror and curiosity more effectively than words; for in effect, the reader is drawn to and feels united with the text and its inquiring characters more by its blanks than by its words.

Yet of course the text must be composed of words; Maturin is bound by the necessity of using a structured

language to write his book. As Leighton notes, language is a necessary means of representation because it has presence, but regardless of how eloquently it is used, it cannot grasp or express truth (153). Maturin is placed in a similar position to Isadora; should he attempt to escape from the deceit of language, particularly the printed word, he has no spray upon which to land; there is no substitute for language. He cannot escape what Nietzsche has called the "prison-house of language".[5] Nevertheless, like his characters who continue to struggle despite a consciousness of futility, he constantly attempts to subvert both his language and his text, pursuing a more adequate means of conveying true feeling, meaning, and community by focussing on absences and uncertainties.

Dawson claims that "paradox . . . can be a philosophical tool for destroying traditional and erroneous ways of thinking and for shedding light on the dangers latent in words themselves" (622). Thus, by introducing paradoxes such as that in which the victim is also the tormentor and the greatest presence is in absence, Maturin manages to subvert the language he uses. He also undermines the efficacy of textual communication: following a Western tradition outlined by Derrida, the Wanderer asserts that colloquial language is better able to convey

truth than books:[6] " . . . colloquial communication is always the most vivid and impressible medium, and lips have a prescriptive right to be the first intelligencers in instruction and in love" (229). The novel, however, must remain a text, so a statement such as this one must be viewed as self-ironic. Despite the author's attempts to introduce a strong sense of orality, inconclusiveness and silence into the text, Maturin not only realizes that ultimately he can leave only a printed text in which, because of its use of language, a community cannot truly be achieved, but he also finds himself caught in the same futile yet obsessive quest as his characters and his readers.

Postscript

Lewis, Godwin and Maturin all take similarly pessimistic views of the power of self-expression and creativity to transcend monotony and repression or to facilitate one's escape from the inevitability of dissolution. Aligning themselves with their subversive, active characters, they perceive life to be either static and meaningless or tumultuous and painfully meaningful. All men appear destined for some sort of imprisonment, even if it is imprisonment in knowledge.

The knowledge characters attain, be it sexual, political or scientific, is ultimately the knowledge of guilt, of mortality and of the absence of both a benevolent deity and a "high truth". Such knowledge forces characters to realize that no individual action is capable of releasing them from their destiny and that, therefore, they have no power to escape. Instead, any exercise of the will results in greater restriction.

The reader is not exempt from imprisonment within a powerless consciousness. For, as Moncada suggests in Melmoth, "the drama of terror has the irresistible power of converting its audience into its victims" (197). In all three novels, the reader is pulled to the centre of the

narrative where he expects to find an underlying truth, but instead finds himself abandoned and alienated from all "truth" in a realm where not even the text remains fixed. Thus, in reading these novels, the reader permits the author to "seduce" him (in Lewis's terms), or to tell his story and to initiate him into irreversible and inescapable consciousness. He discovers that ultimately he cannot leave the text feeling any sense of closure or certainty.

Lewis, Godwin and Maturin play roles similar to those of their transgressing characters. Their goal is not merely to discuss the impossibility of escaping from entrapment, but to enact it by using the narrative and the text to demonstrate the struggle to overcome the formal restriction of the imagination as well as to show the futility of those attempts. These novels therefore represent transgressive acts; because they are also means of telling subversive tales and imprinting their truths on someone else, they also serve as ways by which writers seek to escape by imprinting their truth on someone else. The authors, like their characters, seek an appropriate audience upon which to imprint their tales, but fear that ultimately they may, like Agnes, Caleb or the Wanderer, merely be crying out into a void. For in his preface to The Monk, Lewis suggests that the worst fate his book could

suffer is that of not being read; in Godwin's novel, Caleb expresses horror at the thought that his memoirs might appear to be a "half-told and mangled tale" (326); the story collector and writer who meets Isadora's father at the inn in Melmoth says that such tales as those which Lewis, Godwin and Maturin have written are

> . . . doomed to be recorded in incredible legends that moulder in the libraries of the curious, and to be disbelieved and scorned even by those who exhaust sums on their collection, and ungratefully depreciate the contents of the volumes on whose aggregate its value depends. (304)

All three writers are dissatisfied with the tools available to express themselves with. The literary structures within which they find themselves compelled to work are not appropriate means by which to express their views. Consequently, all three attempt to find a new form of expression by destabilizing their narrators, subverting apparently solid structures, trying to recapture oral traditions of storytelling, and even leaving out parts of the narrative. Despite all such attempts, however, they all remain entrapped by the necessity of employing the written word; their tales are bound in texts, and to reach

any audience at all, writers must use language. Thus the writers are inextricably bound in inexpressibility by their novels.

In their unblinking view of alienation, guilt, uncertainty and despair, and in their experimental, subversive use of form, these novels look forward to late nineteenth-and twentieth-century fiction. Although they are generally dismissed as sensational, popular literature, novels such as these raise significant issues and deserve serious consideration. Their indeterminacy opens the door for inquiries other than simply those about the nature of evil.

Notes

Introduction

[1] Although the eighteenth century distinguished between novels and romances on the basis of their concerns with manners and chivalric adventures respectively, I will use the term "novel" in its modern sense, as it encompasses both types of fiction.

[2] I make a distinction between "society" and "community" on the basis of positive and negative connotations. This distinction is particularly significant in the Melmoth chapter. "Society" describes the authoritarian system in which passive characters dwell. "Community" refers to the ideal unifying collection of people, the ideal towards which Maturin and his characters strive but do not attain.

[3] Sacrifice is a term used in various ways throughout these novels; it is employed in its religious sense, in a substitutive sense, and, as I use it here, as a form of reenactment. Anthropologist Mary Douglas provides a very useful description of sacrificial ceremonies whose function is to purge guilt through symbolic reenactments of crimes (37).

Chapter One

[1] Narratives serve as types of sacrifices as characters reenact their crimes. The relationship between expression and enactment here is interesting, for in a sense, such narratives are sacrifices in the anthropological sense of substitution. See note [3] from introduction.

[2] In this usage of the term, sacrifice refers merely to an exchange; Lewis almost overuses the term, suggesting that he might be mocking the casual view that is often taken towards the religious sacrifice, an attitude that Moncada comments on. See chapter 3 page 105.

[3] Louis Peck agrees with Coleridge's view (38), which, Peck notes, was expressed in the Critical Review XIX (Feb. 1797): 194-200.

Chapter Two

[1] Godwin uses the term "character" at the end of the novel almost as a synonym for self. Caleb discovers at the end that he is nothing more than a character without any true self.

[2] Brombert discusses Romantic poets who flourish in

prison environments; he claims that "[r]epressed freedom and poetic inventiveness are intimately related" (15).

[3] Rothstein cites numerous passages in support of this comparison (211-216).

[4] Rothstein provides a detailed account of the discrepancies between Caleb's account and that which appears in The Newgate Calendar (219-21). He also cites other inaccurate allusions throughout his chapter.

[5] Miller discusses this relationship in terms of authorship; in her view, Caleb constantly struggles to escape Falkland's text by trying to create his own (368).

[6] Miller suggests that Caleb's memoirs, rather than recalling the past, attempt to recreate it as Caleb tries to redefine himself (368).

[7] Jackson cites Bahktin's claims that the novel emerged as a form dominated "by a narrow monological consciousness, whose view is, 'All that has significance can be collected in a single consciousness and subordinated to a unified accent. . . '" (35).

Chapter Three

[1] Throughout this chapter, I will refer to Maturin's Immalee/Isadora simply as Isadora, except when the context requires a distinction as it does on page 129. To distinguish between Melmoth the Wanderer from John Melmoth I will refer to them as "the Wanderer" and "Melmoth" respectively.

[2] The inability to escape from power cycles is discussed at more length in chapter two

[3] Lougy also makes this point at pp. 65-66

[4] Jack Null documents all of the temporal inconsistencies in the novel and suggests that Maturin lost himself in his own labyrintine construction.

[5] Nietzche's phrase is quoted by Jameson as an epigraph to his book by the same title:

> We have to cease to think if we
> refuse to do it in the prison-house of language;
> for we cannot reach further than the
> doubt which asks whether the limit we see
> is really a limit . . .

[6] I have discussed Derrida's comments on the prominence of the oral over the written word in chapter one (29-30).

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