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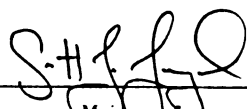
Race and the Gothic Imagination
in Matthew Lewis's Journal of
a West India Proprietor

presented by

Kelly Eileen Battles

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RACE AND THE GOTHIC IMAGINATION IN MATTHEW LEWIS'S *JOURNAL OF
A WEST INDIA PROPRIETOR*

By

Kelly Eileen Battles

A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

RACE AND THE GOTHIC IMAGINATION IN MATTHEW LEWIS'S *JOURNAL OF A WEST INDIA PROPRIETOR*

By

Kelly Eileen Battles

This thesis examines the ways in which the gothic becomes an organizing structure through which Matthew Lewis is able to interpret and represent the culture of the African slaves on his Jamaican sugar plantation as recorded in his *Journal of a West India Proprietor* (1834). In appropriating the gothic as a mode of describing and narrating the Jamaican slave culture, Lewis takes advantage of the epistemological intersections between the gothic and ethnographic discourses as both grapple with questions of the unfamiliar and the uncanny. The racialized gothic tropes established by Lewis in his texts prior to the *Journal* provide a foundation on which Lewis builds his subsequent and steadily more direct gothic representations of race. Beginning with his popular play *The Castle Spectre* that debuted in 1797 and was censored for its controversial treatment of slavery, to his final work, the *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, Lewis conspicuously deploys the gothic vocabulary as a way of representing racial difference and, ultimately, assuaging racial anxiety.

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It was near midnight,--when I woke with a kind of feverish start, and a flashing remembrance of the events of the day. All was quiet, and though the night lamp twinkled faintly, I could distinguish most of the objects in my apartment. I was not only literally awake, but painfully so, for such, indeed, was the state of wakefulness at that hour. I closed my eyes as it were with an effort, and tried to fancy myself drowsy. Suddenly, a gentle *vampire-like* breeze swayed my light jalousie . . . (*Life and Correspondence*, 220-1, italics in original)

--Matthew Lewis

In the above passage from his published letters, Matthew Lewis, best known as the author of the 1796 gothic novel *The Monk*, describes an unexpected visit to his bedroom from one of his slaves whom he had earlier that day accused of stealing yams. In the posthumously published *Journal of a West India Proprietor* Lewis records his experiences and impressions gathered during two visits he made to the Jamaican sugar plantations he inherited upon his father's death in 1812. Lewis omitted from the *Journal* this episode in which the slave Quawboo, struggling with his conscience over the act of thievery, enters his master's bedroom in the middle of the night ostensibly to confess. The episode, discovered on a "fragment of a kind of diary found among Lewis's papers" (213), was subsequently published by Margaret Baron-Wilson in her 1839 biography of Lewis.¹ The midnight encounter with Quawboo, in which Lewis leaps from his bed to accost the unknown visitor and laps into unconsciousness after hitting his head on a marble pillar, is the only moment of incipient danger in which Lewis's slaves break out of the role of grateful, happy children to his benevolent and paternal master that Lewis carefully crafts throughout the *Journal*. Whereas the other material from his letters and notes mostly appears in the *Journal*, perhaps the Quawboo episode's discordance with the rest of the *Journal* explains its omission. Nevertheless, it establishes the explicit fear of insurrection and violence present as an undercurrent throughout the *Journal*. I argue that the text of the *Journal* acts as a site of mediation where Lewis attempts to disarm this

¹The episode also appears, along with a similarly excised African "Nancy story," as an appendix in the 1999 Oxford UP edition edited by Judith Terry, (262-8).

fear in two ways: by maintaining the amused and carefree tone of an objective ethnographic observer and, most uniquely to Lewis, by molding his account according to a template of gothic conventions he establishes earlier within his particular body of gothic fiction. His lurid metaphors inform and prescribe his rendition of Jamaica, predetermining Lewis's narrative construction of the African slave culture.

The Quawboo passage has undeniable echoes of the nocturnal visit made by *The Monk's* Ambrosio to the sleeping Antonia's bedchamber. The supernatural stealth with which the intruder enters Lewis's room results in his intuitive perception of the trespass by the movement of the "vampire-like breeze" that awakens him. Rather than directly perceiving the intruder, Lewis senses Quawboo's palpable presence through the half-heard murmurs of insects and the "dimly cast grotesque shadows" produced by the waning light of the lamp. This menacing and distinctly inhuman threat generates "a succession of crowding fancies" suggesting "stealthy footsteps and half-suppressed breathings approaching nearer every moment" (221-2). The level of suspense is slowly built up as Lewis repeatedly is awakened by a half-heard noise, listens to the silence, and returns to sleep. Finally the stirrings of anxiety escalate into full terror when Lewis notices a "tall shadow pass[ing] slowly between the struggling flame and the transparent draperies" and a "hand and swarthy arm" reaching out (222). Upon leaping at the intruder, Lewis describes the throat he grasps as "the throat of a human being" (222), a modification whose necessity renders explicit the previous hints of the supernatural. The insinuations of a supernatural presence and the heightened drama with which Lewis embellishes the slow approach of the intruder renders an affective distance to this scene of transgression against Lewis as slave master. Casting the episode in the tropes of a fictional mode effectively disarms the terror by removing it from reality. As a dramatist with a taste for extravagant effects and picturesque tableaux, Lewis casts this episode in particular as a set piece in the style with which he had achieved fame on the London stages. *The Journal* itself becomes a type of rhetorical performance in which Lewis

displays an anxiety about the representation of alterity that is then offered to his readers as a gothic spectacle.

Lewis's strategies for representing this encounter with the slave Quawboo resonate throughout his *Journal*. Stephen Greenblatt and others have established that the ethnographic accounts of travelers always exhibit a heavily coded mode of representation employed by the traveler to make sense of the unfamiliar. These codes are an epistemological tool that takes the form of "a powerful set of mediating conceptions by which they [travelers] assimilate exotic representations to their own culture" (*Marvelous Possessions*, 122). The form taken by these mediating codes is heavily dependent on the popular modes of cultural discourse available at the particular historical moment of the traveler's account. At the turn of the eighteenth century into the nineteenth, one of these prevalent modes of representational discourse is the gothic, a term that I employ based on Michael Gamer's conception of it as a shifting, "organic and protean" aesthetic, rather than as a genre (a formulation that came retrospectively and much later).² For Matthew Lewis traveling in 1815 to view his sugar plantations in Jamaica for the first time, a pivotal moment just eight years after Great Britain abolished the slave trade, the gothic becomes an organizing structure through which he is able to interpret and represent the culture of the African slaves on the island. In appropriating the gothic as a mode of describing and narrating the Jamaican slave culture in his *Journal of a West India Proprietor* (1834), Lewis takes advantage of the epistemological intersections between the gothic and ethnographic discourses as both grapple with questions of the unfamiliar and the uncanny.³ In this way, the phrase "*vampire-like breeze*" comes to signify an

²Gamer dates the use of the term "gothic" to denote a specified genre of literature to approximately the 1820s, well after the initial wave of popularity enjoyed by practitioners of the gothic in the late eighteenth century.

³Freud's use of this term is the standard reference point: "that class of the terrifying which leads us back to something long known to us, once very familiar." I am particularly interested in the terror affect produced by the collision between normally opposed terms: familiar and unfamiliar, animation and death. My use of the term "uncanny" also is indebted to Fred Botting's definition of it as "an effect of uncertainty, of the irruption of fantasies, suppressed wishes and emotional and sexual conflicts. A disruptive return of archaic

entire way of seeing in which “the gothic supplies only the metaphors and the gushing response of the safely distant spectator” (Paulson, 217).

H.L. Malchow has argued recently that gothic literature and the colonial discourse of race widely perform as a complementary pair: “[t]he gothic genre of the late eighteenth century, and its various permutations thereafter, offered a language that could be appropriated, consciously or not, by racists in a powerful and obsessively reiterated evocation of terror, disgust, and alienation” (3), concluding that “both the gothicization of race and the racialization of the gothic [are] inseparable processes” (3). Although the two categories of racial discourse and gothic discourse do not converge completely, the tropes of racial anxiety bleed into gothic literature quite frequently as Malchow explains. However, whereas Malchow provides a fascinating account of this principle at work in nineteenth century works such as *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, and the variations of the Sweeney Todd cannibalism legend in which racial tropes influence gothic literature, he mostly ignores the reverse of this relationship between the gothic and racial discourses: the instances in which gothic tropes encroach on ethnographic accounts of race and slavery in the colonial era. While gothic texts such as those examined by Malchow often feature racialized representations of European characters such as the eastern European vampire, the cannibalistic lower class insurgent, or the “Irish Frankenstein,”⁴ Lewis’s *Journal* renders this racialized discourse more explicit than these tacitly racialized fictional figures by blending racial and gothic representation together in order to directly represent and describe non-Europeans, thereby employing the gothic discourse as a method of intervention in the question of cultural difference. Lewis’s texts previous to the *Journal* display a readily discernible evolution in his deployment of the gothic vocabulary to represent racial and ethnic alterity. For Malchow, common gothic tropes such as cannibalism, vampirism, the unnatural half-breed, and the gothic monster result

desires and fears, the uncanny disturbs the familiar, homely and secure sense of reality and normality” (11).

⁴See Malchow pgs. 36, 61-63, and 128.

in “the creation of a popular vocabulary in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by which racial and cultural difference could be represented as unnatural--a ‘racial gothic’ discourse that employed certain striking metaphoric images to filter and give meaning to a flood of experience and information from abroad” (2-3). For Lewis, his account in the *Journal* stands as an interpretation of race based on his first-hand experience of cultural difference in an unfamiliar territory rather than the filtered “information from abroad” employed by other writers as fodder for their gothic fiction. As such, Lewis’s *Journal* is fascinating and useful as the record of a liberal-minded British slave-owner’s attempt to grapple with the massive epistemological problem inherent in the representation of cultural alterity.

Unlike the *Journal*, *The Monk* belongs to the category of gothic fiction discussed by Malchow: texts that feature subtle racializations without directly addressing the topic of race. The racialized gothic tropes established by Lewis in his texts prior to the *Journal* provide a foundation on which Lewis builds his subsequent and steadily more direct gothic representations of race. Beginning with his popular play *The Castle Spectre* that debuted in 1797 and was censored for its controversial treatment of slavery, to his final work, the *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, Lewis conspicuously deploys the gothic vocabulary as a way of representing racial difference and, ultimately, assuaging racial anxiety. I will begin with a delineation of the primary mechanism by which I propose Lewis effects this assuagement: the transgressive spectacle.

The Transgressive Spectacle

Just as the gothic is obsessed with the return of the repressed, the *Journal* records Lewis’s encounter and struggle with his own familial past. In 1812, Lewis’s father died and left his son two slave plantations in Jamaica. Considerably ambivalent about the institution of slavery and determined to exercise control over the treatment of his slaves, Lewis made two voyages to Jamaica between 1815 and 1818, recording his experiences

in a journal he intended for subsequent publication. He died of yellow fever in 1818 while returning to England from the second of these two trips. Lewis's circumstances at the end of his life in Jamaica were such that he lived under the constant threat of imminent violence in the wake of the Haitian Revolution and fears of a similar slave uprising in Jamaica. The gothic sensibility provides an especially fitting epistemological template through which Lewis was able to interpret this threat and ultimately to disarm it through the narrative negotiation for which his journal provided a forum.

The Jamaican slaves loomed in Lewis's consciousness as a constant and visible threat of transgression in the form of violence and insurrection. A literature of transgression, the gothic typically turns on a willful violation of social boundaries that threatens the individual subjectivity of those who witness the transgressive act. My use of the term "transgression" is informed by that provided by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White. In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Stallybrass and White define their use of the term "transgression" through the words of Barbara Babcock as the inversion or contradiction of "commonly held cultural codes" (17), noting that the site of transgression exists in those moments when a hybridization of discrete oppositional categories is effected. Speaking particularly of the fair as a site of transgression, Stallybrass and White note the simultaneous attractive and repellent qualities of the transgressive spectacle in reference to the early modern fair:

The fair as a site of hybridization epistemologically undermined the separation of the economic from 'play' and the clean from the dirty. As a result the emergent middle classes *worried away at it*, particularly striving to separate and consolidate the binaries which the fair so mischievously seemed to intermix and confuse. Such an attempt to clean up the fair's hybridization was a paradoxical, even contradictory ideological project, for the labour of conceptual separation was itself subject to the seductive power of the hybrid. As these boundaries were constructed they were haunted by the play *between* the oppositions which had been formulated. (31)

Although Stallybrass and White focus on the fair as a site of transgression, my use of the term turns on their formulation. The tropes of hybridization they invoke resonate with a discussion of the gothic as deployed by Lewis because the paradoxical response of simultaneous seduction and repulsion is central to the lurid effect produced in the reader of horror fiction. The class dimensions with which they are concerned also transfer well to a discussion of racial divisions because “in the colonial situation the function of class is replaced by race” (JanMohamed, 7). Despite the inevitable threat posed to the individual by the violation of social boundaries, the transgressive spectacle poses a powerful seduction to the spectator, who cannot manage to look away. Stallybrass and White’s notion of the “seductive power of the hybrid” has implications for Lewis’s narrative negotiation between the instances of categorical and epistemological hybridity that appear in his *Journal*.

In order for individuals to preserve a sense of self, they must participate in an unending attempt to maintain the appearance or illusion of consistent boundaries between self and other. According to sociologist Georg Simmel, “the deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture, and of the technique of life” (409). Since transgression violates boundaries, transforming the scene of transgression into a spectacle as Lewis’s particular gothic sensibility seeks to do operates as a preservation of boundaries because this delineates a rigid demarcation between the spectator of the transgression and the perpetrator of the transgression. The spectator becomes an outsider to the scene of violation, while the attempt to violate social boundaries is subjugated under the inherent hierarchical power structure between the powerful observer and the dominated observed. The Quawboo episode previously mentioned serves as a typical example of this mechanism in action. By offering the scene to his reading audience as a gothic tableau, Lewis distances himself from the frightening reality of it. At the same time that he pulls the reader ever closer by

heightening the sympathetic identification with the “victim,” Lewis ceases to constitute himself as this “victim.” Instead, he positions himself as the retrospective narrator operating from a position of safety while relating the events.

Contrasting Lewis’s employment of Gothic spectacle with Ann Radcliffe’s style, Emma McEvoy notes that “[t]he empathetic reading--the heroine-reader sympathy--demanded by Radcliffe’s text, gives way to the presenter-spectator relationship of Lewis’s” (xiv). Transgression threatens the sense of separateness because it acts as a violation of social norms, the maintenance of which is the individual’s most useful tool for maintaining a sense of the self as discrete in the face of the undifferentiated and heterogeneous masses. Transgression threatens to result in not only figurative violence against the individual personality, but also implicitly takes the form of a submerged threat of physical violence. As such, transgression inevitably harbors the specter of death. The gothic preoccupation with images of death can therefore be described as an attempt to disarm the threat of death by transforming it into spectacle.

The remarkably visual nature of Lewis’s particular brand of gothic narrative is epitomized in Louis Peck’s analysis of *The Monk* in his 1961 biography of Lewis:

The Monk is good entertainment because so much happens and because we see it happen. Lewis’ instinct for his dramatic presentation gives him a distinct advantage over his contemporary practitioners in Gothic fiction. The action of the characters may sometimes be preposterous and their speech banal, bombastic, or frenzied, but to see and hear them directly is more effective than to read summarized narrative and conversations at second hand. . . . Lewis arranges his scenes as for a stage spectacle with gaudy colors and striking contrasts of light and darkness.
(42)

Peck’s insistence that he and other readers of Lewis’s text can “see it happen” implies that there is an inherent element of viscosity and vivid representation in his style. Peck’s likening of Lewis’s novel to a “stage spectacle” perhaps explains the reason why the major bulk of his work took the form of drama renowned among theater-going public for

sensational, even gaudy, tableaux.⁵ Peck perceives in Lewis's writing a quality that I argue is an inherent viscosity or sense of narrative as spectacle.

In his *Journal*, Lewis figures himself as a spectacle, situating himself on the categorical cusp between transgressor and transgressed. Stephen Bruhm notes that "for writers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries [gothic] spectaculaity takes on particular importance, for it underlies the ways writers saw and thought about their world" (xvii) so that eventually "the spectacle of another's suffering is channeled through the spectator's more self-centered concerns" (xix). As a purveyor of the gothic world view in his writings, Lewis already participates in an unorthodox, controversial discourse. As a slave owner, he becomes the authority against whom others transgress. Lewis exhibits an unusual blend of liberal and liberatory political leanings in his *Journal*, particularly for a slave owner. He maintains an uncomfortable tension between his status as a slave owner, writing about his slaves in terms of their economic value, and his obvious liberal tendencies as exhibited in his communication with the famous abolitionist William Wilberforce⁶ from whom Lewis sought advice concerning the improvement of slave conditions on his plantations. He displays what Abdul JanMohamed, writing of Nadine Gordimer, describes as "the dilemma of the liberal consciousness that is trapped between its own humanistic values and the highly antagonistic manicheanism of apartheid" (9). Lewis differed still further from the typical plantation slave owner of his time in that his mode of racism stems from a Biblical rather than a scientific mode of

⁵Peck explains that "[g]othic drama was for him primarily a vehicle for thrills and spectacles . . . Lewis' success lay primarily in his ability to arrange arresting effects . . . He delighted in conceiving scenes calling for lavish and gaudy costume. . . . His knowledge of the theater's new mechanical resources, of what mechanics and carpenters could do if they had to, made him bold in planning spectacles, and managers quickly learned that money was well invested in them" (109-110). Of particular note is Lewis's 1811 play *Timour the Tartar*, written specifically for a performing troupe of horses. Peck quotes a letter in which Lewis refers to this play as a "showy spectacle for Covent Garden" and the preface in which Lewis explains that the play was composed "to oblige Mr. Harris, who prest me very earnestly to give him a *Spectacle*, in which Horses might be introduced" (103, italics in original).

⁶The correspondence between Lewis and Wilberforce can be found in *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce*. Ed. Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, (London, John Murray), 1840

rationalization. As D.L. MacDonald notes, “Lewis’s discourse is shaped, not by the pseudo-scientific racism of the Enlightenment, but by an older, religious racism that sees in blackness a sign of the curse of Canaan (Genesis 9.20-5), and of the diabolical” (203).⁷ The religious cast of Lewis’s racism lends itself particularly well to the gothic because of the presence of the demonic and diabolical in gothic conventions. Also, the rational, scientific tone of Enlightenment racism contrasts sharply in tone with the heightened passions and visceral responses of the gothic sensibility. Instead, Lewis’s textual discourse remains firmly grounded in an epistemological exploration of the slaves’ culture through Lewis’s reliance on gothic tropes established in his earlier texts that places his ethnographic account within a larger gothic framework.

Within the trajectory of Lewis’s literary career, his participation in the discourse of the “racial gothic” moves from the subtly racialized imagery of *The Monk*, to his first overt grappings with the political and representational issues of race within the genre of gothic fiction in his play *The Castle Spectre*, and finally culminates in the *Journal*, a work that is completely occupied with this issue. Although references to race and slavery are sprinkled throughout Lewis’s body of work, these three texts specifically display a demonstrable intensification of the racial gothic within the timeline of Lewis’s life. They also address the issue of race in an increasingly more complex manner. Beginning with his earliest work, *The Monk*, Lewis employs the gothic vocabulary as a means of entering into a wider racial discourse

***The Monk* as Epistemological Template**

Lewis’s 1796 novel was by far his most popular and well-known work, resulting in his life-long moniker “Monk” Lewis. Despite the novel’s fame and commercial

⁷MacDonald has performed an exhaustive identification of gothic tropes that appear in Lewis’s *Journal* in *Monk Lewis, A Critical Biography* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2000), 198-210. He does not seek to connect these tropes to a specific resonance with Lewis’s ethnographic imagination or his conception of racial difference.

success, Lewis never ventured to write fictional prose again, choosing instead to focus on poetry and drama. No matter what form his writing takes, however, he always operates within the auspices of his own particular deployment of the gothic vocabulary. As Lewis's first significant foray into the gothic genre, the novel provides the foundation and precedent for the way Lewis will turn its conventions to his own ends later in *The Castle Spectre* and *The Journal*. By first establishing the terms in which critics have traditionally discussed *The Monk* as a transgressive deployment of gothic conventions within a genre typically viewed as transgressive itself, it will be easier to read his later texts as indebted to the unique gothic sensibility that eventually grows out of this initial text. The representational matrix that Lewis establishes in *The Monk* literalizes one of the most common gothic tropes: the specter of *The Monk* haunts Lewis's later works, creating a framework through which Lewis later is able to understand and represent the racially unfamiliar and the culturally uncanny.

The Monk has often been described as a novel that while it operates within the discourse of what is considered gothic literature, simultaneously turns the conventions of the genre on itself in a critical manner. Botting notes that "Lewis's marvellous twist to the conventions of the Gothic tale is indicative of *The Monk*'s ambivalence as it interweaves horror with a general mockery of the genre" (77). Lewis satirizes the moralizing tone in which the Radcliffean tradition explains and diffuses the threat of transgression. Unlike the "terror" category of the gothic defined and employed by Radcliffe,⁸ Lewis's "horror" text "does not refrain from vividly invoking supernatural elements. It often does so in a satirical or brutally mocking manner" (Botting, 77).

Drawing from a conception of transgression as a hybridization of binaries that produces a terror affect, Lewis establishes in *The Monk* a tendency to place his gothic

⁸Radcliffe establishes her distinction between terror and horror in the essay "On the Supernatural in Poetry," published after her death in the *New Monthly Magazine* 16 (1826): 145-52. "Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them" (149).

characters on categorical cusps between genders, races, and even traditional categorizations of hero and villain. For instance, the female demon Matilda not only poses as the young boy Rosario to gain the trust of Ambrosio, but she also situates herself on the cusp between the madonna/whore binary by conflating her image with that of the Madonna portrait in Ambrosio's chamber. Agnes and Antonia break from the Radcliffean model of chaste femininity by participating in scenes of overt sexuality. Multiple characters succumb to prolonged states of unconsciousness due to sickness, delirium, poison, or enchantment, blurring the lines between life and death. The character of Ambrosio himself caused contemporary readers much consternation by failing to align himself completely with immorality and evil. Although Ambrosio is certainly not the first sympathetic villain to appear in popular literature, this hybridization proved to be especially disturbing in the transgressive gothic genre.⁹ Ambrosio's ability to "pass" as a well-respected and virtuous religious leader and Matilda's ability to cross-dress and thereby enter the sanctified haven of a masculine religious order ties into this fear of hidden hybridization through the transgression of real and symbolic boundaries. In *The Monk* Lewis establishes the categorical hybrid as a transgressive type in his own conception of the gothic world view, and the type continues to subsequently appear in much of his fiction. Later the legacy of this type appears in his *Journal* as a ready-made template for interpreting the heterogeneity of the African slaves in Jamaica as a dangerous rupturing of boundaries which he both fears and admires as a transgressor himself.¹⁰ Lewis displays significant anxiety over his own position as a slaveholder with

⁹ Malchow's exposition of the racial half-breed as represented by the vampire as "gothic unnatural" conforms to this model: "Both vampire and half-breed are creatures who transgress boundaries and are caught between two worlds. Both are hidden threats--disguised presences bringing pollution of the blood. Both may be able to 'pass' among the unsuspecting, although both bear hidden signs of their difference, which the wary may read" (168).

¹⁰ Many have speculated about Lewis's probable homosexuality and its implications for psychoanalytical readings of his texts. See, for example, Malchow (186), MacDonald (59-92), as well as Louis F. Peck's vehement denial of Lewis's homosexuality in his 1961 biography of Lewis (65-66). Implications for my argument rest in the fact that Lewis as a homosexual would have inhabited a controversial and potentially dangerous position on a categorical cusp that would have aligned him sympathetically with not only his

liberal abolitionist tendencies, constantly oscillating between a humanitarian and an economic concern for the well-being of his slaves. Keith Sandiford suggests that Lewis reconciles these antithetical tendencies by aestheticizing his experiences in Jamaica:

[Lewis] situates himself between these two politically conflicted constituencies. He negotiates between the ideologies and institutions of enlightened polity allied with subversive contestation on one side (the anti-slavery ideologues), and exploitative economic interests allied with oppressive politics on the other (the pro-slavery interests). The *Journal* accommodates these conflicted impulses by its formal capacity, as narrative, to sublimate Lewis' revolutionary impulses, and to redeem them from the category of mere atomistic collisions with the status quo by transforming them into aestheticized constructions beyond the disquisition of material history. (159-60)

Sandiford's description of Lewis's "aestheticizing" of his Jamaican experience as a strategic tool used to exercise control over his ethical conflicts regarding slavery corresponds to the wider phenomenon I describe as the rendering of transgression into spectacle. Although Sandiford attributes this function to a characteristic of narrative in general, I argue that it has specific resonance as a function of gothic narrative in particular because of the transgressive nature of the gothic imagination.¹¹ Lewis in his fiction inspires horror partly through the effect of categorical slippage in which his characters exhibit a frightening proteanism. He employs this trope of hybridity in the *Journal* to negotiate between his own conflicting ideological and epistemological

transgressive gothic characters, but also with his African slaves. According to Malchow, "Lewis himself was a species of hyphen, a man of ambiguous identity" (186).

¹¹ Sandiford provides a useful exposition of this phenomenon in Lewis's *Journal* as a function of Lewis's employment of the romantic notion of the sublime as the vehicle by which Lewis effects his control over the spectacle of transgression, particularly in the case of Plato the rebellious obeah practitioner: "As an aesthetic construction, the sublime permits Lewis to address an otherwise threatening encounter with otherness, to discover self in other and thereby to transcend otherness" (169). Despite the pervasive role the sublime plays in Lewis's narrative, Sandiford does not pursue the idea further to establish it as a recurring rhetorical strategy in the *Journal*. His argument concerning Lewis remains strictly dedicated to supporting the overall theme of his book in which his concept of "sweete negotiation" ties the colonial rhetorical strategies of a group of six colonialists to a metaphor involving the production of cane sugar in the Caribbean.

positions.

The Monk also establishes Lewis's treatment of another common trope of the gothic. The "return of the repressed," the insurgence of those who have been wronged in a demand for bloody revenge. *The Monk* features instances in which the justifiable desire for revenge exceeds the bounds of reason. The death of the prioress at the hands of an angry mob and Ambrosio's own rebellion against the authoritarian Church are "cases of justification followed by horrible excess" (Paulson, 218). The admittedly evil actions of the Prioress result in the rioters require a justice that goes beyond the desire to punish in that they continue to act out their rage on her body long after she has died: "Yet though She no longer felt their insults, the Rioters still exercised their impotent rage upon her lifeless body. They beat it, trod upon it, and ill-used it, till it became no more than a mass of flesh, unsightly, shapeless, and disgusting" (356). The specter of the gothic mob, with all its echoes of the French Revolution, posits the ultimate outcome of the justifiable desire for revenge as an inevitable disintegration into rage and uncontrolled violence. For the same reason, Lewis for all his liberatory leanings fears the prospect of freedom for his slaves because of the potential for retaliation. He writes in his *Journal*:

Every man of humanity must wish that slavery, even in its best and most mitigated form, had never found legal sanction, and must regret that its system is now so incorporated with the welfare of Great Britain as well as of Jamaica, as to make its extirpation an absolute impossibility, without the certainty of producing worse mischiefs than the one which we annihilate. (249)

The examples of the French Revolution, the Haitian Revolution, and the specter of the gothic mob leave little doubt as to the form in which these "worse mischiefs" would manifest themselves.

The Castle Spectre: Revenge Occluded

Lewis's play *The Castle Spectre* was a great success upon its initial opening on

December 17, 1797, and the play proved to be a perennial draw at the Covent Garden theater throughout the nineteenth century. It was highly popular on stage as well as in print, with eleven editions published by 1803 (Cox, 39). Despite its contemporary popularity the play has received little subsequent attention, with most scholarly interest concerned with Matthew Lewis focusing solely on *The Monk*. This critical neglect compels a brief pause in my argument as I offer a short but necessary summary of the events of the plot.

The Castle Spectre opens sixteen years after *Osmond*, a jealous younger son, murders his brother Reginald and his sister-in-law Evelina in order to seize control of the family title and hereditary property, Conway Castle. Having discovered that the murdered couple's infant daughter Angela survived the attack and lives in a neighboring village, Osmond seizes Angela as a captive in an attempt to force her to marry him. Angela's lover Percy makes an unsuccessful attempt to rescue her from the castle. Subsequently it is revealed that Osmond's long-time servant Kenrick saved Reginald, heretofore assumed to be murdered, and has kept Reginald imprisoned in the castle dungeon for sixteen years unbeknownst to anyone else. Kenrick's resentment of Osmond's tyranny grows until he reveals to Angela that her father lives despite Osmond's murderous plot. Also learning that Reginald lives, Osmond threatens to kill her father if Angela does not agree to marry him. After threading their way through the secret, subterranean passageways to Reginald's cell, Osmond's attempt to kill Reginald is thwarted by the appearance of Evelina's ghost. Angela takes advantage of the distraction to kill Osmond with his own dagger.

None of the significant plot developments rely on the three African slaves that Lewis includes as minor characters. However, these characters--Hassan, Saib, and Muley--prompted significant censorial changes in the performance edition of the play. Lewis subsequently restored many of the expurgated passages in the 1798 published edition, along with explanatory comments that addressed accusations that "the language

[of the play] was originally extremely licentious . . . [and] the sentiments were violently democratic” (*The Castle Spectre*, 221-2). The African characters represent Lewis’s first attempt at the overt representation of race within his body of work. Strangely enough given the censorial problems they caused with the examiner John Larpent,¹² the “violently democratic” sentiments, especially those contained within the speeches of the slave Hassan, were completely secondary to the general plot of the play. In one of the expurgated speeches that Lewis later restored in the published version of the play, Hassan laments his sorrowful state to his fellow slave Saib:

Oh Saib! my heart once was gentle, once was good! But sorrows have broken it, insults have made it hard! I have been dragged from my native land, from a wife who was everything to me, to whom I was everything! Twenty years have elapsed since these Christians tore me away: they trampled upon my heart, mocked my despair, and, when in frantic terms I raved of Samba, [they] laughed, and wondered how a negro’s soul could feel! In that moment when the last point of Africa faded from my view, when as I stood on the vessel’s deck I felt that all [on earth] I loved was to me lost for ever, in that bitter moment did I banish humanity from my breast. I tore from my arm the bracelet of Samba’s hair, I gave to the sea the precious token, and, while the high waves swift bore it from me, vowed aloud endless hatred to mankind. (161)

Hassan’s desire for revenge only erupts as he stands on a ship pulling away from Africa: this ship is literally a liminal space between two cultures and geographies. Hassan’s physical positioning on a categorical cusp renders concrete the transition he undergoes from passive victim to potential perpetrator of violence. Since this is a move from an acceptable position to a transgressive one, Lewis in this case elides his habitual conflation of transgression and hybridity with a physical liminality as the scene of violation. Interestingly, despite Hassan’s ominous threats, Lewis does not employ the slaves as the

¹²In *Seven Gothic Dramas, 1789-1825*. Jeffrey Cox combines material from the Larpent approved version of the play as well as the full, uncensored version subsequently printed for the reading public by placing the censored material within double quotation marks.

instrument of their master Osmond's downfall. Rather, Osmond is ultimately betrayed by his long-time white servant Kenrick. Whereas Hassan's speech invokes the common gothic plot device in which revenge for wrongs committed is called down upon the transgressor by the victim, Hassan continues inactive as others such as Kenrick, Percy and Angela succeed in effecting the revenge he desires. The length and threatening vehemence of Hassan's speeches naturally lead the reader to expect the character's desire for revenge to figure in some way with the culmination of the plot. In the customary gothic schema Hassan would effect his own revenge on his master Osmond perhaps by colluding with the many other characters who also seek such revenge, but Hassan's desire never materializes, remaining a loose end in the plot that is never explained or resolved. This blatant rupture in the normally tight and economic plot lines of stage drama is explicable as a manifestation of Lewis's racial anxiety. Virtually every biographical discussion of Lewis has noted the remarkable sensitivity he displays to the plight of his slaves, as evidenced by his letters, *Journal*, and fiction.¹³ However, this sensitivity does not extend to a willingness to allow any active challenge of the established social order of the slave system. This unwillingness extends to Lewis's fictional representation of slaves as well. They are given great eloquence with which to argue their case, but they remain passively submissive to the established institution of slavery.

In *The Castle Spectre*, the pattern of accordance between the representation of the African slaves and the other characters in the play, coupled with the displacement of Hassan's calls for vengeance onto these other characters for their actualization, requires that a fundamental question be addressed: how central is the discourse of race and the

¹³ See, for example, MacDonald (22, 49-58); Peck (151, 157); and Sandiford (161). Margaret Baron-Wilson's effusively laudatory biography praises Lewis's efforts toward the "amelioration of the unfortunate negroes on his extensive West Indian estates" (120). Lewis attempted many reforms on his plantation, including the abolition of the cart-whip, the recording of punishments in a register, a system of rewards in the form of extra food and health care for expectant mothers, and additional Saturday holidays for his slaves (Baron Wilson, 155-6, and Sandiford, 161). Between his two voyages to Jamaica, Lewis added a codicil to his will witnessed by Byron, Shelley, and Polidori in Geneva in which he expressly requires his inheritors to "pass three whole calendar months in Jamaica every third year" or risk disinheritance in order to avoid the managerial abuse caused by absenteeism.

racial gothic to the narrative of this play? Lewis himself addresses this question in a note he attached to the published version of the play in which he sought to answer his critics. Although Lewis devotes much space in this note to argue of the character Hassan's originality, he denies that the ethnicity of the four slaves contains any larger significance for his drama. Of Hassan, Lewis writes:

I shall not so readily give up my claim to novelty, when I mention my misanthropic *Negro*: He has been compared to *Zanga* [in Edward Young's 1721 play *Revenge*]; but Young's Hero is confined to one object; to destroy the happiness of that object is his sole aim, and his vengeance is no sooner accomplished, than he repents its gratification. *Hassan* is a man of violent passions, and warm feelings, whose bosom is filled with the milk of human kindness, but that milk is soured by despair; whose nature was susceptible of the tenderest affections, but who feels that all the chains of his affections are broken for ever. He has lost every thing, even hope; he has no single object against which he can direct his vengeance, and he directs it at large against mankind. He hates all the world, hates even himself; for he feels that in that world there is no one that loves him . . . But though Hassan's heart is changed by disappointment and misfortune, that heart once was feeling and kind; nor could he hate with such inveteracy, if he had not loved with extreme affection. (222-3)

This description conforms to the typical characterization of Africans in this time as susceptible to wide emotional extremes, never reacting in moderation. In the *Journal*, Lewis portrays Africans as vulnerable to sudden swings between loyalty and gratitude on one hand and betrayal on the other. However, in *The Castle Spectre* this is more accurate as a description of the servant Kenrick rather than the African slaves. Despite the space and attention Lewis devotes to his defense of the character of Hassan in his note, and the obvious pride he displays in Hassan's originality as a dramatic creation, he downplays the role that Hassan's race occupies within the narrative, insisting that it was only an attempt to lend "a pleasing variety to the characters and dresses, if I made my servants black; and could I have produced the same effect by making my heroine blue, blue I should have

made her” (223). MacDonald explains this postscript as Lewis’s attempt to evade his detractors owing to his increased sensitivity to criticism after the vociferous public reaction to *The Monk*, arguing that “[t]his disclaimer has been taken too seriously . . . , with the result that the play has not been taken seriously enough” (51).

In the *Journal*, Lewis recognizes in his own slaves their occupation of a position synonymous to that of the gothic victim hungry for revenge. However, like the Africans in *The Castle Spectre*, he avoids the possibility that this revenge will be actualized, thereby containing the dangerous threat of transgressive rebellion on the part of all African slaves against their European masters which the character of Hassan articulates. Instead, the revenge requisite for the culmination of the gothic plot is displaced. In the *Journal* this occurs within the fictional framework of Lewis’s poem *The Isle of Devils*, whereas in *The Castle Spectre* the character of Angela becomes the vehicle for this actualization through the creation of parallels in their circumstances. Angela often echoes Hassan’s expressions of longing for the shores of his native Africa after her own kidnapping and imprisonment. Not only does she yearn for a reconciliation with her lover Percy, but she manifests an equal sentiment of desire for her home that is always entwined with her love for him much as Hassan’s memories of his wife Samba are inextricably tied to his appeals for Africa: “Oh! sigh no more, my Percy!--Soon shall I repose in safety on your bosom; soon again see the moon shed her silver light on Cheviot, and hear its green hills repeat the carol of your mellow horn” (200). A song given to Angela in the Larpent version of the play makes even more explicit the ties between Angela’s kidnapping and that of Hassan:

Oh, sad was my bosom, by force, when removed
From all those who loved me, from all whom I loved;
With heart near to breaking, despair in my look,
The groves, where my Childhood was passed, I forsook,
And said, while I sighed that my pleasures were o’er,
--’Adieu, ye dear Scenes, I must see ye no more!’ (201).

Whereas Hassan can only extend his impotent threats out of the hearing of his enslavers, Angela delivers a direct and ominous warning to Osmond: “Wonder you that the worm should turn when you trample it so cruelly!” (189). These two characters who coincide in their sentiments and desires appear together in the final scene that encapsulates the divergent possibilities for the fulfillment of their calls for revenge. Angela clings to her father in defiance of Osmond’s demand that she marry him. In Hegelian fashion, the slave responds to the master’s call as Osmond demands Hassan’s help: “Aid me, Hassan!” (218). At this pivotal point in the play, Hassan chooses to assist Osmond in forcing Angela away from her father. Significantly, when Osmond drops his sword, it is Angela who wrests herself away from Hassan to pick it up and stab the villain in the back. At this vital point, Hassan remains dutiful and loyal to his master by restraining Angela despite the vehemence of his previous statements, again embodying the attitude of the ideal slave. Much like Lewis’s own slaves in the *Journal*, the slaves are allowed to complain of their unjust situation but are always represented as being incapable of translating those ineffectual vocalizations into any sort of dangerous physical action.

Lewis’s representation of the slaves in *The Castle Spectre* exaggerates this dichotomy between voice and action because the slaves are given the power of a remarkable eloquence at the same time that Lewis withdraws their ability to act on their convictions. As D.L. MacDonald notes, Hassan speaks “not in the ludicrously ungrammatical dialect usually ascribed to stage slaves . . . but in long and eloquent speeches” (50), an assessment that generally holds up with the exception of Aphra Behn’s fluent and well-spoken Oroonoko. Hassan’s fellow slaves Muley and Saib are equally gifted with eloquence, demonstrating a propensity to make wise epigrammatic observations about human nature throughout the play. However, like Hassan, the two slaves ultimately prove loyal to their master Osmond despite the opportunity given to them by Percy to betray him easily enough in Act II Scene III. Interestingly, the published version of this scene has Percy yell at Saib “Silence, fellow” after the slave

attempts to explain to Percy that his gold cannot bribe him and Muley to betray their master, whereas the Larpent version approved for performance changes Percy's statement to "Silence, traitor" (177). While the shift from "fellow" to "traitor" in the officially sanctioned version of the play may have resulted from a number of explanations, the drastically different implications of the two words cannot be ignored. Obviously the two slaves have just passed a test of their loyalty to their master so calling Saib a traitor does not make sense within the context. It may only be speculated that the examiner in some way objected to the use of the word "fellow" in reference to an African slave. In the end, this exchange between the two African slaves and Percy reinforces two important representational tropes that Lewis later employs throughout his *Journal*: slaves may engage in light-hearted trickster activities such as their swindling of Percy, but these pranks act as an innocuous testing of boundaries that always reinscribes and reinforces the ties of feudal loyalty. This phenomenon points to another way in which the gothic vocabulary provides an apt method of entering into discussions of race. Whereas Hassan's vitriolic speeches and Percy's attempt to bribe the other slaves to betray their master hint at the dangerous potential of these slaves to actuate these threats, their inability to do so strengthens the very ties they threaten. Similarly, the transgressive nature of gothic writing "become[s] a powerful means to reassert the values of society, virtue and propriety: transgression, by crossing the social and aesthetic limits, serves to reinforce or underline their value and necessity, restoring or defining limits" (Botting, 7).

Whereas the conventional gothic fulfillment of revenge owed to Hassan and the other slaves by virtue of their status as Osmond's victims is subverted and ultimately actualized by Angela, the character of Osmond embodies a different trope of the "racial gothic." He becomes a racialized figure, that of the villain with racially ambiguous dark features. Angela describes him as having a "strange demeanour . . . in that gloomy brow is written a volume of villainy" and rightly deduces simply from his appearance that he must be "an assassin" (166). Elsewhere he is depicted as "gloomy and ferocious" (159).

Osmond's evil deeds are motivated by extreme resentment and jealousy of his older brother Reginald, "a sweeter gentleman by half" who succeeds in making the Lady Evelina his wife. He explains to Reginald in the final scene, "Was not 'Submit to your elder brother,' the galling lesson for ever sounded in my ears?" (216). From this we learn that, similar to Angela, the servant Kenrick, and the African slaves, Osmond's desire for vengeance derives from his forced submission to an authority that he does not recognize. Conforming to what MacDonald termed Lewis's "religious racism," Osmond's racialized villainy takes the form of a younger, Cain-like brother with murderous tendencies toward his kind and accomplished older brother. His anger manifests itself within the play with threats that mirror those most often associated with slaves: arson and poisoning.¹⁴ As a slave owner in Jamaica, Lewis later manifests a significant fear of these threats in the *Journal*. In one significant speech, Osmond envisions a fiery death for both himself and his enemies: "Soon will Northumberland's guards encircle my walls, and force from me- -Yet that by Heaven they shall not! No! Rather then resign her, my own hand shall give this Castle a prey to flames: then plunging with Angela into the blazing gulph, I'll leave this ruins to tell posterity how desperate was my love, and how dreadful my revenge!" (187). Immediately after this speech, Osmond exits and Saib informs Kenrick of Osmond's plot to poison him later that evening to rid himself of the possibility of Kenrick's betrayal. The juxtaposition of arson and poisoning so closely in the text, two staples of the slave owners' narrative production of the rhetoric of fear, heightens the characterization of Osmond as a racialized villain.

While Lewis's postscript denial of the importance of race to his play as anything other than an attempt to produce variety may have satisfied his critics, it cannot be denied

¹⁴The fear of arson and poisoning extends beyond Lewis, becoming a prevalent and abiding fear among the white planters and citizens of the Caribbean islands. In *The Black Jacobins*, C.L.R. James mentions the "homicidal mania" of the slaves in Haiti, noting that "poison was their method" (16). He describes the torching of Le Cap in Haiti as the signal to other slaves that an insurrection had begun (86-89). The Haitian revolution had resulted in freedom and the establishment of the Haitian state in 1803, an event whose proximity in time and geography had serious implications for the slave-owning class in Jamaica.

that there exists within the play at least some points of significant parallelism between the characterization of the African slaves and the more prominent European figures in the play. The African as victim of gothic transgression is mirrored in Angela, while the African as the tool of righteous gothic vengeance emerges in Kenrick and, only in the end, Angela. Finally, the African as dark gothic villain is reflected in the character of Osmond. Significantly, only the passive role of victim can be forthrightly shared by the African slave characters while the more dangerous, subversive roles are inevitably taken away from the African characters, notably Hassan, and diverted to these subtly Africanized European characters for fulfillment. This pattern of parallelism between the African and European characters in the play looks toward the fear of racial impurity displayed particularly in Lewis's *Isle of Devils* poem.

The Isle of Devils: Text as Liminal Space

During Lewis's passage back to England after his first voyage to Jamaica he copied into the *Journal* a poem, *The Isle of Devils*, that he had written earlier enroute to Jamaica. The sudden appearance of this long poetic interlude in an ostensibly non-fictional journal renders the *Journal* itself into a type of mongrel text, a hybrid construction of genres, voices, and discourses in competition with each other. *The Isle of Devils* is the forum in which Lewis works out much of his anxiety concerning racial impurity and the mixing of categories and it is interesting that in doing so, Lewis renders his text an indefinable pastiche of narrative voices and interpolations. Composed and copied in the liminal geographic space of the Atlantic Ocean, the poem occupies a middle space in the text as well, appearing between the accounts of Lewis's two voyages. The geographic and textual space apart in which this poem exists attains in turn a discursive liminality in which Lewis displaces his racial anxiety into a highly allegorical manifestation of Biblical/religious racism. He temporarily abandons the objective ethnographic project apparent in the rest of the *Journal* to fashion an allegorical fantasy.

Within this narrative Lewis's most overtly racialized gothic villain acts out many of the fears that by this time had become part of the rhetoric of hysteria among the white population in the Caribbean.

Although the poem displays a fear of miscegenation in featuring the repetitive rape of the chaste, white heroine Irza by the racialized demon king, the "sable lord" of the island (178), the two offspring that result from the rapes do not display the mixed features of the half-breed. Lewis thereby denies biologism to create a fantasy of racial purity in which each child takes on the features of one parent rather than exhibiting an amalgamation of the physical traits of both parents such as the mulattoes Lewis encounters in Jamaica. The first child has "shaggy limbs, and eyes of sable fire" (172) and inspires only hatred and disgust in Irza because of his resemblance to the demon father. The second child's ivory skin, golden hair, blue eyes, and coral lips resemble Irza's own features, inspiring devotion and love in the mother. By denying the possibility that miscegenation results in a mixture of racial categories and identities in this poem, Lewis reflects and responds to his own disgust with the mulatto population in Jamaica. Lewis desires a manichean allegory in which a racially diverse society attains a "'pure' state of manichean opposition and equilibrium between good and evil" through the elimination of categorical hybridity (JanMohamed, 35).

The rest of Lewis's *Journal* exhibits an anxiety of hybridity that borders on hysteria. Although at many times Lewis speaks praisefully of his African slaves, for the mulattoes he reserves contempt for their effeminacy and viciousness:

I think it is Long¹⁵ who asserts, that two mulattoes will

¹⁵The passage from Edward Long's 1774 *The History of Jamaica. or, General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of That Island: with Reflections on its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws, and Government*, reads in part:

"Some few of them [the mulattos] have intermarried here with those of their own complexion; but such matches have generally been defective and barren. They seem in this respect to be actually of the mule-kind, and not so capable of producing from one another as from a commerce with a distinct White or Black . . . Yet it seems extraordinary that two

never have children; but, as far as the most positive assurances can go, since my arrival in Jamaica, I have reason to believe the contrary, and that mulattoes breed together just as well as blacks and whites; but they are almost universally weak and effeminate persons, and thus their children are very difficult to rear. On a sugar estate one black is considered as more than equal to two mulattoes. (68-9)

In Lewis's estimation, racial purity prevails over racial hybridity. Lewis's reference to Edward Long suggests that he employed Long's 1774 *History of Jamaica* as a resource for information about the island and its inhabitants. Although Lewis displays a willingness and disposition to read Long with a critical eye in his disagreement about the mulattos' reproductive capacities, Long's anxiety about the mixing of races in both a reproductive and social sense has implications for Lewis's own anxieties. Describing the jail in the Jamaican settlement of St. Jago de la Vega, Long bemoans the commingling of races and genders necessitated by the common holding area:

In this delightful place of custody debtors and malefactors of all sorts, all sexes, and complexions, are promiscuously crowded; a circumstance highly disgraceful to the publick humanity, more especially in a country where it is thought politically expedient to maintain a distinction between Whites and Negroes. It is therefore not a little astonishing that the debtor and the criminal should be huddled together; and that White persons, who have committed no other offence than that of insolvency, should be associated with the most bestial and profligate wretches of the Negroe race, as if it was intended to show that incarceration, like death, is a leveler of all distinctions. (Book II, 14)

Long's portrait of the heterogeneous and transgressive masses mingling in the Jamaican jail recalls Stallybrass and White's account of the early modern fair. Although Long evinces nothing but disgust at this spectacle, it is the type of transgressive display likely

Mulattos, having intercourse together, should be unable to continue their species, the woman either proving barren, or their offspring, if they have any, not attaining to maturity; when the same man and woman, having commerce with a White or Black, would generate a numerous issue. (Book II, 335-6)

to attract Lewis's gothic imagination. The jail triggers the "seductive power of the hybrid" with its challenge to social barriers that threatens to extinguish human difference completely. Long's comparison of incarceration to death, which he calls the "leveler of all distinctions," echoes Baudrillard's conception of death as "incurable deviance" because of its ability to obliterate human constructed boundaries and categories. Long's triangulation of transgression, death, and hybridity in this passage anticipates the three primary elements of Lewis's ethnographic conception of the African population in Jamaica.

In his representation of the mulatto people Lewis conflates racial ambiguity with gender ambiguity, suggesting that one type of hybridity expands to produce multiple levels of hybridity. He styles the male mulatto as effeminate and the female mulatto as masculine in appearance: ". . . [T]he women of color are deficient in one of the most requisite points of female beauty. When Oromases was employed in the formation of woman, and said,--'Let her enchanting bosom resemble the celestial spheres', he must certainly have suffered the negress to slip out of his mind. Young or old, I have not yet seen such a thing as a *bosom*" (69). Lewis banishes the gothic half-breed from his fictive Isle of Devils, denying the potential for the uncontrolled proliferation of human difference. Only two categories are allowed to exist: the virtuous white and the tormented black. Lewis often evinces considerably more anxiety at the prospect of racial or gender ambiguity as opposed to the complete otherness of the racially pure or ultra-feminine figure. In this he again echoes his informational resource, Edward Long. Warning his readers against miscegenation, Long describes in horrified tones the situation in the Spanish colonies:

Let any man turn his eyes to the Spanish American dominions, and behold what a vicious, brutal, and degenerate breed of mongrels has been there produced, between Spaniards, Blacks, Indians, and their mixed progeny; and he must be of opinion that it might be much

better for Britain, and Jamaica too, if the white men in that colony would abate of their infatuated attachments to black women, and, instead of being “grac’d with a *yellow offspring not their own*,” perform the duty incumbent on every good citizen, by raising in honourable wedlock a race of unadulterated beings. (Book II, 327).

Long reserves his most vitriolic racism for the progeny of mixed relationships, seeming to place all racially “unadulterated” peoples hierarchically above these people of ambiguous heritage. Lewis solves this anxiety through his banishment of the “gothic half-breed” from his poem *The Isle of Devils* by only allowing Irza to give birth to children of visually determinable race. This fantasy, however, does not extend to Jamaica, where an ostensibly white child might indeed have a measure of African blood in its veins. Outside the safe confines of *The Isle of Devils*, a constructed narrative over which Lewis can maintain control, the racially mixed population of Jamaica reveals that even whiteness itself is suspicious. As will be seen, eventually even the poem cannot maintain this stance.

In Jamaica, which Lewis configures as a literal Isle of Devils, he lists and defines five different racial categories other than black and white: mulatto, sambo, quadroon, mustee, and musteefino. At the ends of the spectrum the categories bleed into each other and Lewis notes that “the children of a musteefino are free by law, and rank as white persons to all intents and purposes” (68). The racially ambiguous in Jamaica walk among the white population unnoticed much as Lewis’s gothic villains like the monk Ambrosio are able to pass among the population mistaken for the virtuous.¹⁶ Echoing this sentiment, the monk of *The Isle of Devils* urges Irza to abandon her demon-sired white child, warning that evil may masquerade in the guise of beauty: “Fair is the imp! and shall he therefore breathe / To win new subjects for the realms beneath? / The fiends most

¹⁶In *Subjects of Slavery, Agents of Change*, Kari Winter notes that “Gothic novels and slave narratives show that some protagonists subverted the system by taking identification to its logical extreme: women presented themselves to the world as men and blacks assumed the appearance of whites” (123). Winter’s text locates a string of mostly superficial correspondences between slave narratives and the texts of female gothic writers without establishing any explicit representational ties between the two genres.

dangerous are those spirits bright, / Who toil for hell, and show like sons of light” (180). Although characters that exceed categorical boundaries abound in his earlier fictional texts, Lewis strives toward a rejection of the possibility of hybrid constructions in *Jamaica*, a position rife with contradictions that he is ultimately unable to maintain. This rejection of liminality extends even to the most minor details of the Jamaican environment. Lewis notes that even the twilight between darkness and day does not seem to exist on the island (72) and during his first voyage to Jamaica he complains of the tropical waters as exhibiting only the two extremes of “heavy gales or dead calms” (13). Temperamental nature is thereby elided with the extreme moodiness of the slaves: effusively happy or outright rebellious.

The Journal: Lewis’s Gothic Vision at Work

Fittingly given the anxiety displayed in *The Isle of Devils* and throughout the *Journal* over hybridity in categories of human difference, Lewis establishes a rigid binary structure in which the slaves in the *Journal* fall into one of two classifications: passive, feminized victims suggestive of the helpless Agnes and doomed Antonia of *The Monk*, and the charismatic villains reminiscent of Ambrosio. Lewis’s fascination with the legendary exploits of Plato, the famed leader of African resistance on the island, and Adam, an insurrectionist and purported practitioner of Obeah, speak to the seductive powers of the mutinous and violent gothic villain. Lewis praises Plato as a romantic revolutionist upholding a set of utopian ideals: “He robbed very often, and murdered occasionally; but gallantry was his every day occupation. . . . Every handsome negress who had the slightest cause of complaint against her master, took the first opportunity of eloping to join *Plato*, where she found freedom, protection, and unbounded generosity” (59).

Much more common than the charismatic villain, however, are the representatives of the other type: the passive victim. Lewis’s sympathy and paternalistic benevolence

toward his slaves has been well documented. His personal identification with the misery of the slaves torn from their homes and subjected to a transatlantic passage finds its first manifestation in Hassan's excised speech quoted above in which the slave expresses grief for his homeland and lost wife Samba. Establishing a parallel, this speech is echoed in Angela's speech in remembrance of her homeland. Lewis repeats these two characters' cries of loneliness and separation in the *Journal*. During his first transatlantic crossing in which he re-enacts the passage of the Jamaican slaves he journeys to see, he inserts in the *Journal* a poem that echoes Hassan's grief over the separation from his loved ones. It reads in part:

No more can I, estranged from home,
Their pleasures share, nor soothe their moans;
To them I'm dead as were the foam
Now breaking o'er my whitening bones. . . .
Demon of Memory, cherish'd grief!
Oh, could I break thy wand in twain!
Oh, could I close thy magic leaf,
Till those I love are mine again! (14-15)

The poem's supplication to the oblivion of lost memory to erase the pain of an estranged homeland and absent loved ones inserted during Lewis's narration of a dangerous ocean voyage to a Jamaican sugar plantation establishes unavoidable parallels with the journey of his own slaves, as well as the fictional Hassan. In doing so, Lewis elides his own situation with that of the slaves and, by extension, to that of his passive gothic victims, potentially in an attempt to deny his own villainous collusion in the situation that prompted such sentiments.

Whereas Lewis carefully places his slaves in one of the two rigid categories of villain or victim, Lewis himself moves very freely between his own two roles of benevolent empathy and indifferent practicality as he repeatedly calculates infant deaths in terms of economic loss. Immediately upon arriving in Jamaica for his second visit, Lewis is disappointed to learn of the low number of infants produced by his slaves in the

previous year:

Yet, among upwards of three hundred and thirty negroes, and with a greater number of females than men, in spite of all indulgences and inducements, not more than twelve or thirteen children have been added annually to the list of the births. On the other hand, this last season has been generally unhealthy all over the island, and more particularly so in my parish; so that I have lost several negroes, some of them young, strong, and valuable labourers in every respect; and in consequence, my sum total is rather diminished than increased since my last visit.
(202)

That Lewis's first concern upon arrival is an inquiry that enumerates human mortality in terms of economic loss affirms that his "indulgences" have as their ultimate motive his own commercial profit rather than a sincere benevolence. Although Lewis's hysteria about hybridity pervades the *Journal*, he remains aloof to the fluidity of his identity as a slave owner with both abolitionist tendencies and a desire for commercial success.

With few exceptions, Lewis characterizes most of the slaves as gentle and light-hearted. It is mostly in the narrative ruptures such as the short lyrical poems, the *Isle of Devils* narrative, and the excised Quawboo episode when his racial hysteria emerges. Although references to poisoning and arson by the Jamaican slaves and maroons abound in the *Journal*, Lewis anticipates his own death by an allegorical poisoning even before his first arrival in Jamaica. In a neoclassical poem dedicated to the figure of "tropic Genius" Lewis represents the figure as an African king: "Of dark sea-blue is the mantle he wears; / For a sceptre a plantain branch he bears; / Pearls his sable arms surround, / And his locks of wool with coral are crown'd" (18). Lewis gifts his allegorical figure with sovereignty over tropical diseases that kill so many Europeans visiting the Caribbean and begs the tropic Genius to spare him from the same fate: "Let not thy strange diseases prey / On my life; but scare from my couch away / The yellow Plague's imps; and safe let me rest / From that dread black demon, who racks the breast" (19). Lewis conflates the double threats of poison and disease and renders them under the

control of an African, thereby literalizing many of the fears experienced by European slave-owners traveling to Jamaica. Lewis disarms the threat of poisoning by speaking of it in a lighthearted and jocular manner. He decries “the facility with which they are frequently induced to poison to the right hand and to the left” and relates several anecdotes in which his neighbors and acquaintances suffer near escapes from a poisonous death:

Another agent, who appears to be in high favour with the negroes whom he now governs, was obliged to quit an estate, from the frequent attempts to poison him; and a person against whom there is no sort of charge alleged for tyranny, after being brought to the doors of death by a cup of coffee, only escaped a second time by his civility, in giving the beverage, prepared for himself, to two young bookkeepers, to both of whom it proved fatal. (93)

Interestingly, in the midst of his fears of poisoning by the slaves, Lewis associates poisoning as a weapon of choice traditionally employed against the English aristocracy by errant clergy: “. . . more than one of our English sovereigns died of eating too many lampreys; though, to own the truth, it was suspected that the monks, in an instance or two, improved the same by the addition of a little ratsbane” (67). Lewis’s propensity to cast even violent, morbid, or unpleasant events in a mode of understated humor is a defensive rhetorical strategy that belittles the perpetrators of the threat at the same time that it acknowledges the efficacy of the threat. This mechanism not only operates as a method of emotional distancing when Lewis makes observations of others.

Paradoxically, his blasé attitude has about it a forced quality that belies Lewis’s false self-construction as a benevolent and well-loved master against whom no slave would knowingly trespass. This attitude becomes most strained in episodes in which Lewis’s slaves are obviously engaging in intentionally subversive behavior. During a significant act of defiance in which a large group of female slaves refuse to work and manage to completely halt the work of the plantation, Lewis dismisses the coordinated insubordination as a “petticoat rebellion” led by “a little fierce young devil of a Miss

Whaunica" (87).

Just as Saib and Muley in *The Castle Spectre* are prone to test their boundaries through innocuous pranks, Lewis fills much of the *Journal* recounting instances that he attributes to "monkey-tricks" and laziness (86). Lewis seems to be ignorant of the slaves' capacity to engage in acts of passive resistance, representing the perpetrators more as naughty children rather than coming to terms with their capacity to undermine the functioning of his plantation. He prefers to ascribe their blunders to stupidity rather than artifice, particularly in the case of Cubina whose humorous misunderstandings waste hours in lost productivity (244). This representation of the slaves as helpless and child-like not only configures them within the gothic trope of the passive female victim. It also configures Lewis himself as one of the benevolent paternal figures who frequently people his plays and stories.

These episodes form part of a larger rhetorical phenomenon in the *Journal* whereby Lewis aestheticizes the unpleasant or the anxiety-provoking, turning moments of fear into amusing vignettes offered to the readers of the *Journal* as entertainment. Even the sight of the Lewis family mausoleum is mined by Lewis for maximum dramatic effect when he notes its similarity to a "theatrical representation of the 'tomb of all the Capulets'" (66). The aesthetic pleasure provoked by the mausoleum's correlation to a theatrical representation leads Lewis to ponder that "the sight of it quite gave me an appetite for being buried" (66). Here as throughout the *Journal* Lewis renders his environment and companions into a theatrical spectacle, valuing them more for their potential dramatic effect rather than evincing any concern for the well-being of himself or others. This tendency becomes massively evident during his perilous journey across the mountainous Jamaican landscape to visit the city of Kingston. The striking landscape corresponds to what the later Romantics would characterize as sublime, mixing the awesome beauty and deadliness of raw nature. "The road [to Kingston] wound through mountain passes, or else on a shelf of rock so narrow--though without the slightest

danger--that one of the wheels was frequently in the sea, while my other side as fenced by a line of bold broken cliffs, clothed with trees completely from their brows down to the very edge of the water" (98). Despite Lewis's insistence on the complete safety of the mountain pass, during a similar voyage to his second plantation, Hordley, one of his horses falls into the water and barely manages to pull itself back on the ledge as the carriage balances on one wheel (225). Lewis, however, is much more affected by the theatrical power of the scene as his "cavalcade wound along through the mountains" (99), commenting that "nor should I have been greatly surprised to see a trap-door open in the middle of the road, and Captain Rolando's whiskers make their appearance" (99) during the voyage through the mountain pass. This reference to an imaginary trap-door is reminiscent of Lewis's fondness for the elaborate mechanical trappings and outlandish props that characterize his own theatrical productions.

Although these examples depart from a specifically gothicized vision of race, they represent the wider application of strategy by which Lewis renders scenes of transgression or anxiety into spectacle in order to defuse their threat. That this defensive strategy extends beyond the *Journal's* dealings with race speaks to the flexibility of the aestheticizing gothic imagination in which it continuously reinscribes the boundaries that it threatens through the very process of threatening those boundaries.

The gothic has often been characterized as a highly revolutionary and politically subversive genre, closely associated with the violence and terror of the French Revolution. Conversely, revisionist critics have argued that the apparently subversive elements of the gothic are always ultimately nullified, instead resulting in an eventual reaffirmation of the existing power regime. Lewis's body of work culminating in *The Journal* demonstrates that the gothic can paradoxically encompass both subversive and conservative tendencies within the same moment. Lewis can simultaneously glorify the transgressive and revolutionary potential of his slaves at the same time that he manifests an anxiety of that potential. Ronald Paulson's explication in which *The Monk's*

Ambrosio encompasses a volatile mixture of contradictory tendencies can be expanded as an apt representation of Lewis's narrative construction of himself as a slave owner: "the peculiar figure of Ambrosio as victim and aggressor" is traced in a trajectory of "revolutionary activity imaged through Ambrosio's career, as the progression from repression, through revolution, to the Terror, where the repressed son assumes the same aspect as the tyrannical father" (*The Monk*, xvi). Lewis is both enforcer of and transgressor against the social hierarchy in Jamaica that privileges the dominance of the planter class. He figures himself as both the "repressed son" and the "tyrannical father," a archetype that first appears in Ambrosio. Paulson notes that "the model of the sublime as it emerges in 'Monk' Lewis does correspond to one version of the general pattern Burke at once detected in the French Revolution: first destroy the father and then of necessity become more repressive than he was" (220). Lewis begins his career as a rebel and transgressor and, like Ambrosio, he ends his life as a "tyrannical father," a role with which he is morally conflicted. *The Journal* manages to encompass these antithetical impulses by directing this ethnographic account of racial and cultural alterity through a filter of gothic tropes. As a movement featuring inherently contradictory impulses of revolutionism and conservatism, the gothic proves to possess a particular affinity to the maintenance of such a paradoxical project.

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