**Gothic Populations: Matthew Lewis's *The Monk***

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B.A. University of Colorado, Boulder, 2011

A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Department of English

University of Virginia
May, 2014

**Abstract:**

Published in 1796, Matthew Lewis's seminal novel *The Monk* was conceived in a decade obsessed with the French Revolution. Behind this obsession, though, were growing anxieties over population which would develop into a major moral-philosophical debate following Thomas Malthus's *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798). In addition to the threat of political uprising, these anxieties concerned the various pressures of an expanding urban life such as sanitation, housing, employment, and food production; the difficulties of political representation in increasingly diverse communities; and, importantly for this investigation, the financial problems that accompany a growing populace. Several critics have examined Lewis's narrative representation of crowds and mobs as a Gothic figuration of the French Revolution, but no critic has linked *The Monk's* populations and crowds to the larger socio-economic, socio-political issue of population, which is much broader than political revolution alone. This essay reads the crowds in the novel as sublime and argues that Lewis's novel positions the crowd in a symbiotic relationship within institutional power and not, as existing criticism argues, a power struggle between government and mob. In order to show this difference, I argue that Lewis's climatic mob scene has many shared characteristics with financial panics, revealing the regulatory power of the populace. Along the way, this essay also examines the characters of Ambrosio and Antonia in terms of the Malthus-Godwin debate over "the organic perfectibility of man" to tease out the complex relationship between institution, community, and individual. As a result of this different interpretation on *The Monk*'s mobs, a new set of questions arise regarding the impact a burgeoning population had on the emerging concept of "Nation"; the identity of the individual within a growing and changing community; and the defining qualities of the Gothic sublime, which has been largely tied to the awful powers of God or Nature and not to Man himself.

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M.A. Thesis

1 May 2014

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> Scarcely had the Abbey-Bell tolled for five minutes, and already was the Church of the Capuchins thronged with Auditors. Do not encourage the idea that the Crowd was assembled either from motives of piety or thirst of information. But very few were influenced by those reasons; and in a city where superstition reigns with such despotic sway as in Madrid, to seek for true devotion would be a fruitless attempt[.]
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> --Matthew Lewis, *The Monk* (1796)

Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) opens by warning the reader to not make assumptions based on appearances. As the reader might otherwise immediately assume that the "Auditors" assembled in the church are there for "motives of piety or thirst of information," the narrator, without any visible hesitation, demands that his reader think otherwise—hardly allowing that assumption to be made before he denies it entirely. These instructions foreground how the entire novel might be read: *The Monk*, in the most basic sense, is the story of a crowded church ("thronged") which is overwhelmed with people lacking moral conviction. That is, *The Monk* is about the failure of appearance and the burden of population. The narrator tells us, in simple terms, that this is not a tale of "piety," and so it isn't. The narrator continues:

> The Audience now assembled in the Capuchin Church was collected by various causes, but all of them were foreign to the ostensible motive. The Women came to show themselves, the Men to see the Women: Some were attracted by curiosity to hear an Orator so celebrated; Some came because they had no better means of employing their time till the play began; Some, from being assured that it would be impossible to find places in the Church; and one half of Madrid was brought thither by expecting to meet the other half. (Lewis 7)

After the initial warning not to look for "true devotion" in the Church, the narrator fills the first images of the work with a crowd of disinterested Madrileños—not the Church itself nor even the notorious monk Ambrosio, the novel's title character. At first, this seems especially odd, as readers of Gothic novels might wonder why Lewis supplants a description of the medieval church with a rabble of its visitors. Looking forward, however, to the crisis of the novel, where the angry mob wreaks havoc on the abbess and the convent, this opening is actually well suited for the Gothic plot. Instead of the sublime force of vast, ancestral halls of an Inquisition-era Abbey, Lewis underscores the mass of people as an even greater sublime: one capable of toppling the walls of even the most awe-inspiring structures.

The apparently disappointed gothic expectations complicate the manner in which this crowd is menacing. The comic representation of the crowd in the church mirrors the later, more tragic scenes of crowds that replace space as the principally fearsome presence; it is not the church or the hallowed space that is Gothicized, but rather the potentially violent crowd which inhabits it:

> Every corner was filled, every seat was occupied. The very Statues which ornamented the long aisles were pressed into the service. Boys suspended themselves upon the wings of Cherubims; St. Francis and St. Mark bore each a spectator on his shoulders; and St. Agatha found herself under the necessity of carrying double. (Lewis 8)

Combined with the narrator's warning that "to seek for true devotion [in Madrid] would be a fruitless attempt," the crowd's encumbrance on the aisles, seats, corners, statues, and saints makes the scene nothing short of threatening, despite the crowd's complacency. The religious aura of the space is overcome and suffocated by the people who are crammed in. The statues, no longer standing alone and above the church-goers, are now forced into anonymity amongst the people; and the Saints, who might otherwise seem too daunting to approach, are mere seats reserved for the ambitious spectator. Indeed, it would be a very little stretch to suggest that, in these words, Lewis deliberately equates the saints themselves with mere statues and the Church with a capital 'c,' with a mere building in order to create a vision of the institution under a threat of over- and mis-use.

The crowd in this opening scene, while not actively aggressive or even discontented (beyond the annoyances of being crowded), is a consensus of disinterest and vain complacency. Not a one is there for a church service, not a one is there for religious fervor. The only reason for the bulk of the crowd to be a *crowd* is that half of them followed the other half. That or they have arrived because they anticipated a lack of seating and, on that basis alone, felt they ought to be present. While Ambrosio will deeply touch his auditors with his religious speech, the crowd initially appears to care little, if nothing, for his anticipated words: the narrator tells us, "As to the remainder of

the Audience, the Sermon might have omitted altogether, certainly without their being disappointed, and very probably without their perceiving the omission" (Lewis 7). The scene is heavy with the weight of people and the potential for violence and yet is comically devoid of any purpose. The implied violence in this opening scene anticipates the later climactic mob scene in which an enraged crowd destroys the adjoining convent and slays its proud and murderous prioress.

That later scene has been well analyzed as an anxious response to the revolution in France during the 1790s.[1] However, this opening scene suggests that the novel's larger preoccupation with crowds and the public is more complex than a representation of revolution and political upheaval. Lewis's novel emerged in a decade remarkable for a preoccupation with the populace. Preceded by the French Revolution and followed by the first British census in 1801, the novel is unavoidably privy to the representations of populations and the social impacts of crowds. Despite its title, *The Monk* is a novel about the behavior of people. By this I mean, *the* people: *the* mob, *the* crowd, *the* populace, *the capita*.[2] I argue that the novel enters into a much broader discussion of population,

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[1] Critics such as David Collings and James P. Carson have made moves away from this common interpretation in suggesting that the crowds in *The Monk* in combination with the negation of the female body implicates (for Collings) a sexualized, monstrous vision of the contests between power and counter-power in society and (for Carson) Lewis's own ambivalence towards the efficacy of extreme social controls on rebellion, particularly in the debates surrounding slavery and women. See Collings 131-160, Carson 75-104.

[2] Using the terms 'mob' and 'crowd' can be problematic. These terms have historically, with broad sweeping and imprecise usage, tended to refer, negatively, to a poor, racially- and gender-tinged multitude that acts without clear or rational motive. George Rudé and E.P. Thompson have made great efforts to dispel this tendency of historical study to "crass economic reductionism, obliterating the complexities of motive, behaviour, and function" (Thompson 187). For my purposes, I will refer to the "crowd," "mob," "populace," etc. in a very generalized and hopefully unbiased manner, leaving the racial, classed, or gendered associations of the "mob" for another study. In doing so, I will, however, acknowledge the motives of the crowd as decisive, and not "spasmodic" as many early historians, economists, and sociologists have done. See Thompson 185-351; Rudé 3-16.

particularly the debate that would, soon after *The Monk*'s publication, become dominated by Thomas Malthus's *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798)[3] and that work's antagonists—particularly William Godwin.

This discussion addressed the issue of population and politics in an English society struggling to understand the French Revolution, the efficacy of the Poor Laws, and financial panic as well as the growing anonymity of London culture and difficulties over political representation, public health, and colonial and slave uprisings. While many English, prior to the 1801 census, did not know or believe that the population was in the midst of rapid expansion, increasing crowds and changing demographics—especially in London—were everywhere creating new social, political, and economic problems.[4] In response to an atmosphere plagued with new concerns on the weight (physical, political, financial, moral, etc.) of burgeoning populations in London and elsewhere, the debate sparked by Malthus centered on the moral problems created by an expanding populace. It was at first a question of controlling the vices of a growing populace: namely, how to balance self-interest with social beneficence. That is, it was not the direct impacts of population, such as housing, food supply, and waste control, but rather the indirect ones—moral issues of charity, procreation, and vice—which fueled the most heated

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[3] For the purposes of this essay, I will be referencing the Oxford World Classics edition of Malthus's essay which is based off of the 1798 first edition which, I feel, has greater relevance to the time in which *The Monk* (1796) was written and produced. Malthus made numerous changes and additions to his *Essay* in the course of his lifetime according to the numerous responses and critiques the work received after its initial publication. Please also see the Norton Critical Edition of Malthus's *Essay* (2004), which is based on both the first and second editions (1803) edited by Philip Appleman.

[4] See John Plotz, *The Crowd: British Literature and Public Politics* (Berkeley: 2000) for a detailed look at how English Crowds and a new urban, London culture impacted life, politics, and literature from 1800 onward.

discussion on population. On Godwin's side was the Whig belief in a positive correlation between population, wealth, and virtue, a notion that grew out of the benefits of capitalism and the introduction of credit systems.[5] Malthus attacked this notion in his *Essay,* which claims that economic wealth would increase birth rates and decline death rates, leading to an increase in population which would in turn increase wellbeing to the point where food production failed to sustain the number of people. From this, Malthus claimed that morality in an overpopulated society would be subject to *greater* and not lesser vice and misery, due to the natural limitations of the earth and the impulses of man to procreate and act self-interestedly.

My concern here is the power—whether political, economic, or physical—held by the crowd and its inclusion in the Gothic narrative. In *The Monk*, where the crowd serves almost as an additional character, the force of population becomes an uncanny representation of the crowds that defined the 1790s. By exploiting the cultural fear of the unrestrained masses, Lewis envisions a "mathematical sublime,"[6] which looms threateningly over Western social and political institutions. This sublime force, the crowd, while prominent in just a few scenes, makes its presence known throughout as a sort of potential energy waiting to be released on *The Monk*'s Madrid.[7] Lewis's work

[5] See J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: essays on political thought and history, chiefly in the eighteenth century* (Cambridge; New York: 1985) 37-73, 215-310.

[6] To borrow a phrase from Clara Tuite, "Frankenstein's Monster and Malthus' 'Jaundiced Eye': Population, Body Politics, and the Monstrous Sublime," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 22.1 (1998): 141.

[7] I will specifically work with Burke's concept of the sublime: "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable" (Clery and Miles 113).

exploits Gothic conventions to envision the sociological impacts of the crowd on institutions as well as the private lives of its individual subjects. Lewis's gothic population, charged with sublime energy and effect, visualizes the power of the masses to make or break social institutions. In this way, the mob in *The Monk* can represent political upheaval as one of many social issues caused or impacted by crowds, such as housing, food distribution, sanitation and public health, financial manias and panics, and charity and public welfare.

Of particular note is the novel's narrative resemblance to the crowd's impact on financial markets. Later in this investigation, I will concentrate on the phenomena of panics and manias: financial spectacles which were first introduced on a grand scale by the crash of the South Sea Company and onwards through the mortgage crisis of today. By the time Lewis would write *The Monk,* the English had witnessed numerous examples of financial panics both large and small, including the South Sea Company and Mississippi Company crashes in 1720, the commodities crash in Amsterdam in 1763, the East India Company crash in Amsterdam and the related housing and canal crisis in Britain in 1772, another canal mania in 1793, and an emerging crisis in canals and securities that would "burst" just as *The Monk* was going to publication.[8] While the mob in *The Monk* is not explicitly representative of financial panic, the similarities in the crowd behavior of both the novel and the financial markets help us examine the identities of and relationships between crowd, individual, and institution in the late eighteenth

[8] See Charles Kindleberger, *Manias, panics, and crashes: a history of financial crises* (New York: 1978) for the causes, histories, and outcomes of these crises.

century[9] and the manner in which Lewis's novel mediates them within the conventions of the Gothic narrative.[10]

The Gothic is a key narrative form in which to mediate the issues of population in the 1790s. Both the explained and unexplained supernatural, in connection with a displacement of historical time and geographic space, enable the writers and the readers of Gothics to contend with the unsettling realities of population growth and the complex relationships that accompany those realities. As David Collings writes, works like Lewis's give voice to the feared and fearing in a growing society:

> These tales literalize the adventurous figures of speech [denouncing the mob as monstrous] that animate the writings of Burke, Bentham, and Malthus, but by giving them bodies and enabling them to disturb the living, they give them agency even in their inhuman condition. Precisely in its most extreme and notorious strategy—the depiction of ghosts and

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[9] See E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common*, (New York: 1991) for a detailed analysis of food riots, yet another example of the crowd dilemma in this era.

[10]While *The Monk* is perhaps the most obvious example of a "mathematical sublime" in the form of crowds, it is not the only Gothic that has incorporated some vision or suggestion of the populace. On this topic, the work most critically represented is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Writing directly on Malthus, Burke, and Shelley's novel, both Tuite and Collings have demonstrated the affinity of the creation of the monster with the emergence of the populace—specifically overpopulation. Another, or you might say the, canonical Gothic, Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), also contains issues of population, though they are rather marked by the absence of concern over the novel's crowds. In Walpole's architecture, upon which many critics have focused, there is a disconnect between space and spatial capacity: how does one cramped, medieval castle (and adjoining hostel) contain not only Manfred's family and servants, but also the Vicenza train of knights, cavalry, soldiers, and sword bearers of at least several hundred, without so much as a hint of domestic or spatial difficulty? Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) also takes an interest in issues of population, though with a decidedly more positive (or at least sympathetic) representation; in travelogue formula, the novel contains several short images of poor, foreign villages plagued by famine and disease while hinting at a problem of overpopulation: critical work herein is very limited.

> monsters as fictionally real—the Gothic makes possible a direct refutation of disciplinary strategy in a way it cannot anticipate. (Collings 16)

Collings's point here is appropriate in discussing population and the Gothic. The Gothic, through its exaggerated, grotesque unrealities and historical, geographical, cultural, and political displacements, mediates the phenomenon of burgeoning population and the accompanying struggles of identification and representation of the individual—both as a representative of the crowd itself as well as his or her place within it.

**Population and perfection: impossible representatives**

One main issue that plagued Malthus was an overly optimistic belief—greatly supported by Godwin—that society, and the individuals who create society, were on a never-ending path towards rational and moral improvement. This claim stemmed from an ambitious belief in Adam Smith's law of the invisible hand; Godwin, like several others, believed that once economic equilibrium could be achieved and all men are made equal and equally propertied, man would make the rational choice to not over-procreate and to act with benevolence and charity towards his neighbor.[11] Malthus, however, saw this optimism as folly and in his *Essay* sought to demonstrate how perfect virtue is an impossibility—it is part of the nature of man to procreate and is an impulse which will

[11] From Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793/1796), "In a state of society, where men lived in the midst of plenty, and where all shared alike the bounties of nature, these sentiments [envy, malice, and revenge] would inevitably expire. The narrow principle of selfishness, would vanish. No man being obliged to guard his little store, or provide, with anxiety and pain, for his restless wants, each would lose his individual existence in the thought of the general good. No man would be an enemy to his neighbor, for they would have no subject of contention; and of consequence, philanthropy would resume the empire which reason assigns her. Mind would be delivered from her perpetual anxiety about corporeal support, and free to expatiate in the field of thought which is congenial to her. Each would assist the enquiries of all" (Godwin 294-295).

never disappear. Lewis's novel leans on the Malthusian side of this issue and comments on the often problematic moral and economic relationship between self and community suggested by Smith. In *The Monk,* perfect virtue—especially virginity—is shown to be not only impossible, but a deception (even *self*-deception) which causes great harm to self and society. The deception of perfect virtue is harmful in Lewis's novel because it requires a sort of absolute isolation from society (read: the crowd) in order to obtain that perfection: a requisite which raises questions regarding the authenticity of that virtue. That is, how can a man or woman be a representative of perfect virtue if he or she has been always isolated and thus never tempted by vice?

The packed church at the beginning of the novel suggests physical, biological threats of a claustrophobic nature, and not merely because we might tremble at the thought of a sudden panicked stampede. The middle-aged Leonella and her young and innocent niece Antonia—also the niece of the Marquis de las Cisternas, and soon to be courted by Lorenzo and later raped and killed by Ambrosio—both remark on the oppressive heat and the aggressive nature of those unwilling to offer their seats or make room: "Holy Virgin! What Heat! What a Crowd!" exclaims Leonella, and Antonia responds, "let us return home immediately; The heat is excessive, and I am terrified at such a crowd" (Lewis 8-9). Invasion of personal, sexual space is also indicated in the confrontation over Antonia's veil—both a symbol of her virtue and also a protective barrier between herself and the fearsome "public" which surrounds her:

> [Lorenzo] advanced his hand towards the Gauze: The Lady raised hers to prevent him.
>
> 'I never unveil in public, Sengnor.'

> 'And where is the harm, I pray you?' interrupted her Companion [Leonella] somewhat sharply; 'Do not you see, that the other Ladies have all laid their veils aside, to do honour no doubt to the holy place in which we are? I have taken off mine already; and surely if I expose my features to general observation, you have no cause to put yourself in such a wonderful alarm!" (Lewis 11)

It is interesting here that Leonella suggests that, despite Lewis's aforementioned claim that little piety is to be found in the church, all of the other ladies in attendance have removed their veils in respect to the "holy place." Note also how, like the half of the crowd who followed the other half to the event, Leonella argues that Antonia may remain decent if she follows the lead of her aunt and the other ladies in attendance, even though it was earlier noted how the "Women came to show themselves" and not for any motive of respect to the church. The removal of Antonia's veil symbolically compromises her innocence. In a manner humorous but also intensely foreboding, the narrator comments satirically on the foolish, and perhaps dangerous, custom of "following the crowd." Furthermore, the threat to Antonia's innocence implicated by the crowd emphasizes her status as one of the two representatives of sexual purity (Ambrosio being the other) who will meet corruption and destruction by the end of the novel.

This foreshadowing of Antonia's destruction introduces the novel's concern over the individual in conflict with the crowd. While there is a conflict of the individual in merely struggling to find a place to stand, there is also a strong indication in the removal of Antonia's veil that it is a moral dilemma in which the virtue of the young woman, new to society and seeking to resist its perversions, finds difficulty resisting the moral

consensus of the multitude. Antonia's idealized innocence is threatened by those who admire her innocence as a sort of unobtainable perfection—hence Ambrosio's impulse to destroy her innocence later on. As if to mercilessly drive the point of Antonia's future loss of innocence, Lewis immediately follows the church scene with that of Antonia's second experience with popular entrapment: where she and Leonella indulge in the sensational fortune-telling from the "wicked…Gypsy, a sort of vagabond, whose sole occupation is to run about the country telling lyes" (Lewis 36), as Leonella labels her. Antonia's eagerness to indulge the gypsy, the crowd, and her own curiosity reinforce her increasing immersion into societal influence—shown in the image of the crowd enthralled with the gypsy that blocks Antonia's and Leonella's passage: "Here a Crowd collected before their door permitted them not to approach it" (Lewis 34). Again Antonia removes clothing facing this new crowd: "in imitation of Leonella, Antonia drew off her glove and presented her white hand to the Gypsy" (Lewis 38). Then, after receiving her fortune from the gypsy, the crowd and their enchantress disappear, leaving Antonia's path clear once again:

> Having said this, the Gypsy again whirled herself round thrice, and then hastened out of the Street with frantic gesture. The Crowd followed her; and Elvira's door being now unembarrassed Leonella entered the House out of humour with the Gypsy, with her niece, and with the People; In short with every body, but herself and her charming Cavalier. The Gypsy's predictions had also considerably affected Antonia; But the impression soon wore off, and in a few hours She had forgotten the adventure, as totally as had it never taken place. (Lewis 38-39)

The narrator negates Antonia's reaction to the gypsy. Just as the ambivalent spectators at the Church of the Capuchins might have forgotten the omission of its keynote speaker, Antonia almost immediately forgets the Gypsy's cryptic predictions, which foretell of a "Lustful Man and crafty Devil" that will bring about her "destruction" (Lewis 38). Whether this is due to Leonella's initial warning that the Gypsy tells "lyes" or to Antonia's own skepticism or lack of attention is not clear, but it is clear that the reader never receives any detail of Antonia's understanding of the prophecy beyond that she was "considerably affected." Further, the narrative attention paid to Leonella's irritation with the "People" in this passage dominates Antonia's own reaction to her less-than-happy fortune. While the gypsy's fortune telling serves the novel's plot and Lewis's clear generic goal, the fact that both the narrative and Antonia forget the occurrence so quickly and that her access past the crowd to her private home was allowed by her listening to her future "destruction" suggests that, foreshadowing aside, another key element in this gypsy scene is the crowd that listened and the crowd that first blocked and then receded from Antonia's path.

Lewis's placement of Antonia in these two crowds is more than coincidental. The overwhelmed church and the obstructing crowd that follows the gypsy underscore a popular, social morality in contention with the individual—the crowd follows itself to the place of worship as it follows the gypsy. In the wake of the crowd, solitary and innocent individuals like Antonia suffer for the corruption of gross anonymity disguised as social welfare. As one of the novel's emblems of sexual perfection (i.e. innocence), Antonia's vulnerability to the corruption by the crowd implicates not only her moral identity but the morality of that society which both threatens and seeks to include her. Antonia's virtuous

image is both determined and undermined by her identification (or lack thereof) with the rest of society. Though in other ways Antonia is far from perfect, the novel's emphasis on Antonia's sexual innocence and social isolation makes her a figurative icon of virtue.

Drawing attention to these crowds and Antonia's relationship to them, Lewis captures the pervasive social concern regarding not just crowds in themselves, but the manner in which a mass of people has an impact on social wellbeing and the institutions (official or not) which seek to maintain a requisite moral code.[12] The relationship between crowd and institution would become the source of the greatest contention in debates over population and virtue, especially once Malthus took the stage a few years following *The Monk*'s publication. Malthus argued against the concept that man is innately virtuous and could exist peacefully and successfully in the absence of institutions like law and religion. Malthus believed that man was not innately virtuous, and thus was subject to vices which make the absence of ruling institutions impossible. Railing against Godwin's vision of a "system of equality," in which institutions are removed and society is ruled through communal wealth and mutual respect, Malthus writes,

> The great error under which Mr Godwin labours throughout his whole work is the attributing almost all the vices and misery that are seen in civil society to human institutions. Political regulations and the established administration of property are with him the fruitful sources of all evil, the hotbeds for all of the crimes that degrade mankind. Were this really a true state of the case, it would not seem a hopeless task to remove evil

[12] See Thompson, *Customs in Common,* particularly his chapter titled, "The Moral Economy of the Crowd."

> completely from the world; and reason seems to be the proper and adequate instrument for effecting so great a purpose. But the truth is, that though human institutions appear to be the obvious and obtrusive causes of much mischief to mankind, yet in reality they are light and superficial, they are mere feathers that float on the surface, in comparison with those deeper-seated causes of impurity that corrupt the springs and render turbid the whole stream of human life. (Malthus 75)

The problem of Godwin's "great error," Malthus suggests, is that given an "overcharged population" (a populace that exceeds available sustenance and something Godwin saw as a distant and unlikely threat), peace and civic stability would collapse and "selfishness would be triumphant" (Malthus 76) as self-preservation becomes the priority for every individual. In arguing against this utopian socialism, Malthus here claims that a populace under pressure (in his argument, the pressures of starvation) becomes a destructive, aggregate force: "[t]he spirit of benevolence, cherished and invigorated by plenty, is repressed by the chilling breath of want. The hateful passions that had vanished, reappear. The mighty law of self-preservation expels all the softer and more exalted emotions of the soul" (Malthus 80). Self-interest and a natural impulse to procreate are those "deeper seated causes of impurity" which corrupt the social body. For Malthus, the threat of "overcharged population" is not directly an instance of overt violence or even a symptom of institutional corruption, but rather a strain on social welfare in which the crowd is victim to, and not perpetrator of, misery and vice caused by the weight of its own mass. And such is the quality of Lewis's crowd in the opening chapter: the crowd in this scene

is not intentionally dangerous or corruptive, but is so because of the natural impulses of its amassed individuals.

The lack of room in the church causes a tension between self-interestedly keeping a seat and the desire to experience *with* the crowd. This tension between self and community, which complicates the conflict over group morality, will persist throughout the novel. For the individual in *The Monk,* community is both good and evil in its effect on the self and vice versa. As previously mentioned, Antonia is threatened by the corruption within a public atmosphere; however, it is Antonia's isolation from a community that will assist in her downfall. While she is envisioned as pure, her early encounters with society prefigure her status as an impossible model of innocence similar to that of her yet unrecognized brother, Ambrosio. Her lack of practical education and social savvy imprisons her in the ignorance that will provoke and enable Ambrosio's plot against her. That is, like his attraction to Matilda—the scheming woman who disguises herself as a monk and seduces Ambrosio—for her resemblance to the portrait of the Virgin Mary, Ambrosio's desire is heightened by the appearance of Antonia's innocence: "An air of enchanting innocence and candour pervaded her whole form; and there was a sort of modesty in her very nakedness, which added fresh stings to the desires of the lustful Monk.... He remained for some moments devouring those charms with his eyes, which soon were subjected to his ill-regulated passions." (Lewis 300).

In their own ways, Thomas Malthus and Mathew Lewis question the concept of the "organic perfectibility of man" (Malthus 67). As London rushed toward one million inhabitants on the tide of industry informed by Adam Smith's invisible hand and bolstered by new developments in medicine and agriculture, many believed the human

condition was racing towards perfection and, with that status, the perks of indefinitely prolonged life, universal wealth, and a happy, virtuous society. In retrospect, we can see why Malthus feared this sort of optimism, believing such perfection far off but also impossible due to the physical limitations of both man and earth. Malthus warned that English and European societies, in an unchecked population boom, were on the brink of mass destruction through an inability to sustain growing numbers. What Malthus cautioned against the most forcibly in his *Essay* was a foolhardy belief that the human can give up neither its drive to procreate nor its self-interest.[13]

One interpretation of Malthus's problem with Godwinian idealism may be understood as a dilemma over private versus public health. Remarking on the dialogue concerning human perfection, Catherine Gallagher argues that Malthus, unlike Godwin, viewed individual health in a negative correlation with social health; that is, the healthy individual breeds more, eats more, and socializes more, a consequence aggregating to detrimental social body health problems of overpopulation: namely excessive reproduction followed famine, disease, and other miseries:

> Malthus's theory destroyed the homological relationship between individual and social organisms by tracing social problems to human vitality itself. For him, the human body is a profoundly ambivalent phenomenon. He admits that Hume and even such utopians as Godwin are right to see the rate of increase in the number of human bodies as a sign of

[13] Malthus especially criticized the Poor Laws which seemed to encourage rather than reduce vice and misery as a result of a lack of understanding of man's imperfectability Malthus's complaint against the Poor Laws was that they assumed, like Godwin, that increased prosperity could assist moral and financial virtue—that is, charity can instigate the profligate to become responsible and successful citizens. Instead, Malthus claims, charity encourages vice in the form of laziness and irresponsible reproduction.

> *present* physical prosperity and even healthy, "innocent" social institutions. But Malthus simultaneously sees the unleashed power of population, the reproducing body, as that which will eventually destroy the very prosperity that made it fecund, replacing health and innocence with misery and vice. (Gallagher 37)

Gallagher here traces the inverse correlation between individual health and social health which is not fully explicit in Malthus's *Essay* but present in his theme of individual versus social benefit. What is important here is how she strikes at how Malthus's principle as more moral dilemma than moral economy. That is, benefit and malfunction in the individual/social relationship are not only correlative but causative: "Intemperance in every enjoyment defeats its own purpose. A walk in the finest day through the most beautiful country, if pursued too far, ends in pain and fatigue" (Malthus 89).

This is the very same issue for the innocent Antonia. Her sexual purity, representing the moral health of Madrid, is physically threated by her visibility and inclusion in the crowd. Antonia and Ambrosio—and even Agnes, who is brutally punished by the prioress for sexual transgression—while threatened by society's interest in their supposed perfection, are drawn into that corruption by the very nature of their exclusion. Antonia is the model of innocence as a direct result of her isolation and ignorance of profligacy (by the direction of her mother), just as Ambrosio is Madrid's idol as a result of his never leaving the monastery since he arrived as a supposed orphan. Had neither of the siblings been isolated in this manner, their notoriety—due to their supposed innocence and virtue— within the society that idolized them would not have drawn them to their physical corruptions. By the end of the novel, the siblings will each

suffer through extreme physical mortification as a result of their perfection: Antonia is raped and stabbed, and Ambrosio is tortured and broken after his great, literal fall at the hands of Lucifer.[14] As models for perfection, Ambrosio, in the eyes of Madrid's populace, and Antonia, in the eyes of Ambrosio, become representations of the overly optimistic view of human virtue endorsed by Malthus's opposition. For Gallagher, they also represent the precarious physical health of the larger social body. In this they function rhetorically similar to Malthus's illustration of Godwin's utopian socialism in which Malthus allows for the removal of controlling institutions to demonstrate how quickly Godwin's lovely picture is ruined. In Gallagher's language of physical health:

> Malthus begins his demonstration, therefore, by granting the time-honored homology: healthy individual bodies represent a healthy social organism…. unlike Hume's scheme, however, Malthus's is temporally dynamic; the strong body entails a present and a future social condition: first a society of innocence and health and then one of vice and misery. The degeneration from one society to the next, moreover, is effected neither by inner corruption nor by external adversity. It is solely a product of the procreative vigor of the body itself. (Gallagher 38)

Lewis's Ambrosio- and Antonia-narratives function very similarly; the narrator emphasizes their perfection and idolized virtue to reveal how perfection of this sort is unobtainable. Like Malthus's demonstration of the Godwinian utopia, the picture of

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[14] Collings calls the physical mortifications of Ambrosio, Antonia, and Agnes (along with Matilda, the Bleeding Nun, and the Madonna portrait) "the obliterated body of *jouissance,*" (Collings 144) to explain how the pure object becomes desecrated and grotesque through an act of improper sexuality. See Collings 139-144.

Antonia and Ambrosio's perfection quickly withers away into bodily mortification: "This beautiful fabric of imagination vanishes at the severe touch of truth…. The rosy flush of health gives place to the pallid cheek and hollow eye of misery" (Malthus 80). [15]

Perhaps the most emblematic moment of this rhetorical structure is the premonition given to Antonia by the gypsy in the first chapter and promptly forgotten:

> Jesus! what a palm is there!
>
> Chaste, and gentle, young and fair,
>
> Perfect mind and form possessing,
>
> You would be some good Man's blessing:
>
> Alas! This line discovers,
>
> That destruction o'er you hovers;
>
> ………….
>
> When you one more virtuous see
>
> Than belongs to Man to be,
>
> One, whose self no crimes assailing,
>
> Pities not his Neighbor's Failing,
>
> Call the Gypsy's words to mind:
>
> Though He seem so good and kind[.]

[15] This vision of health decaying into malnutrition is one shared by Agnes after her sexual transgression with the Marquis and her subsequent imprisonment in the dungeons of the convent. Her appearance even to Lorenzo, her brother, is unrecognizable even as human: "a Creature stretched upon a bed of straw, so wretched, so emaciated, so pale, that He doubted to think her Woman. She was half naked: Her long disheveled hair fell in disorder over her face, and almost entirely concealed it. One wasted Arm hung listlessly upon a tattered rug, which covered her convulsive and shivering limbs … Opposite to her was a Crucifix, on which She bent her sunk eyes fixedly" (Lewis 369). However, Agnes, unlike Ambrosio or Antonia, recovers, which is an indication that, being less perfect than those other models of perfection, she may return to the social body in health.

> (Lewis 38)

This premonition foretells not just Antonia's rape, but both her and Ambrosio's inability to see past the appearance of virtue. While seemingly right in doing so, her mother Elvira instructs her daughter to reject superstition while also insulating her from all sexual knowledge that is, in a major way, her undoing. By attempting to preserve her daughter's ignorance, Elvira essentially enables Ambrosio and Matilda's plot to spoil that innocence in the worst way. At first Antonia is "chaste, and gentle, young and fair, / Perfect mind and form possessing," but that purity and perfection is undone, not at the hands of some greater evil but by her inability to "see" past the appearance of virtue: referring, of course, to Ambrosio. Even after this fortune, her mother's vague but strong warnings about Ambrosio, Ambrosio's early attempt to rape Antonia, and the warning suggested by her mother's ghost, Antonia still fails to recognize the evil intentions of the abbot, as if the warnings given were little more than superstitious folly. Even at the scene of the rape, Antonia at first awakening seeks in Ambrosio her rescuer and not captor:

> Ambrosio? My Friend? Oh! yes, yes; I remember are you with me? Oh! Flora bad me beware …..! Here are nothing but Grave, and Tombs, and Skeletons! This place frightens me! Good Ambrosio take me away from it, for it recalls my fearful dream! Methought I was dead, and laid in my grave! Good Ambrosio, take me from hence. Will you not? Oh! will you not? (Lewis 381)

Antonia's durable ignorance of Ambrosio's dangerous lustfulness seems stretched beyond belief, which emphasizes the role her lack of knowledge of the vices of man plays in her destruction. Though it is precisely her ignorance which makes her virtue perfect, it

is that lack of worldly knowledge, particularly sexual knowledge, resulting from being "brought up in an old Castle in Murcia; with no other Society than her Mother's" (Lewis 12), which is the cause of her later misery at the hands of Ambrosio. Her ignorance prevents her from seeing past the appearance of Ambrosio's supposed virtue to his "procreative vigor of the body." Waking in a tomb surrounded by physically corrupted bodies, but somehow still ignorant of the spiritually corrupted Ambrosio, and in the presence of a man who had already once "violated with his bold hand the treasures of her bosom" and attempted "to take still greater liberties," Antonia is "imposed upon by the Monk's reputed virtue" (Lewis 262-63). While Antonia never does become morally corrupted like her brother, the novel indicates that failing to see past the facade of Ambrosio's (and man's) virtue to its true corruption is her mortal error. Her confused and dramatic cries in this passage mixed with the excessive punctuation of exclamation marks, elipses, semicolons, and question marks, function almost like tragedy as she struggles past her own failure to see the true Ambrosio.

It is not only Antonia, however, but Ambrosio who cannot see past the appearance of his own perfection until it is far too late to save himself. Prior to his hideous fall at the hands of Lucifer, Ambrosio is chided by the devil: "Tremble at the extent of your offences! And you it was 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? Know, vain Man! That I long have marked you for my prey" (Lewis 440). While Malthus, in his attempt to disenchant his readers of their visions of perfection, outlines the existence of misery and vice with a morbidity that borders on eugenics, Lewis performs the same lesson using the Gothic mode to heighten, satirize,

and grossly exaggerate the folly of Ambrosio's supposed perfection to which all of Madrid aspires. For Ambrosio, in parallel to Antonia, separation from worldly vices is the source of both his assumed perfection as well as his eventual fall from grace. Oddly, Ambrosio, in spite of all of his confidence in his own virtues and asceticism, recognizes early on—even before his friend Rosario is revealed to be the disguised Matilda—how isolation from society is the bane of true moral perfection. To Rosario, who is lamenting all society including that of the monastery, Ambrosio says,

> Man was born for society. However little He may be attached to the World, He never can wholly forget it, or bear to be wholly forgotten by it. Disgusted at the guilt or absurdity of Mankind, the Misanthrope flies from it: He resolves to become a Hermit, and buries himself in the Cavern of some gloomy Rock. While Hate inflames his bosom, possibly He may feel contented with his situation: But when passions begin to cool; when Time has mellowed his sorrows, and healed those wounds which He bore with him to his solitude, think you that Content becomes his Companion? Ah! no, Rosario. No longer sustained by the violence of his passions, He feels all the monotony of his way of living, and his heart becomes the prey of Ennui and weariness. He looks round, and finds himself alone in the Universe: The love of society revives in his bosom, and He pants to return to that world which He has abandoned. Nature loses all her charms in his eyes: No one is near him to point out her beauties, or share in his admiration of her excellence and variety. (Lewis 53)

Ambrosio's speech here is remarkably similar to Malthus's own strike against Godwin's utopia. Like Ambrosio's "Misanthrope," Malthus determines that the very thought of removing the ruling institutions of the social body is merely an act of denial of the true nature of humanity. That is, Godwin's utopia is a denial that institutional controls are necessary to control the crowd:

> And thus it appears that a society constituted according to the most beautiful form that imagination can conceive, with benevolence for its moving principle instead of self-love, and with every evil disposition in all its members corrected by reason and not force, would, from the inevitable laws of nature, and not from any original depravity of man, in a very short period degenerate into a society constructed upon a plan not essentially different from that which prevails in every known state at present; I mean a state divided into a class of proprietors and a class of labourers, and with self-love for the main-spring of the great machine. (Malthus 86)

A utopia of the sort Malthus criticized is, for all its ideal beauty, little more than a denial of the nature of man, just as Rosario/Matilda's misanthropist dream is a denial of the individual's interdependence with society—a relationship both beneficial and corruptive. This position, in which "self-love" supersedes "benevolence" as the moderating force of social welfare, reaches back to Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) that, in combination with his even more influential *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), set the baseline for this debate on individual versus social virtue. Lewis's narrative structure, in which Ambrosio (and his devotees) believes himself "absolved from human frailties and free from error and vice," antagonizes what is a latent dilemma in Adam Smith's discourse:

the disconnect between self-interest and sympathy or between individual profit and social benefit:

> When the original passions of the person principally concerned are in perfect concord with the sympathetic emotions of the spectator, they necessarily appear to this last just and proper, and suitable to their objects; and, on the contrary, when upon bring the case home to himself, he finds that they do not coincide with what he feels, they necessarily appear to him unjust and improper, and unsuitable to the causes which excite them. (*ToMS* 81)

For Smith the harmony or discord within society comes from a sympathetic balance between individuals resulting from the manner in which we can feel the pain or pleasure of our fellow humans. That is, humans have the ability, through the strength of their imagination, to feel as another feels; we can sympathize with the joy or pain of another, because we can imagine what that joy or pain would feel like to ourselves. If there is a great difference in the joy or pain of one and the sympathy of that joy or pain in another, then social discord is the result.[16]

What the reader is to find in the narratives of Ambrosio and Antonia, as in Malthus's *Essay*, is recognition of the inseparability of the individual and the social and

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[16] This concept is the foundation for Adam Smith's political economy: humans have a desire to exchange as a result of their own self-love. In order for exchange to be possible, one must appeal to the self-interest of another: "if you give me what I want, I will give you what you want." Thereby, barring any intervention of a biased third party, self-interest acts as an invisible hand to direct both parties to mutual agreement and profit: "They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants, and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species" (*ToMS* 251).

how that unavoidable relationship is by nature problematic, even parasitic. The isolation of Ambrosio and Antonia make their different forms of virtue unsuited to existence in the larger society. This unsuitability is much stronger in Ambrosio because both his vices and virtues—in appearance—so far exceed what is normal. Antonia, on the other hand, is vulnerable in her innocence, and is thus destroyed at the very moment of her awakening to the vices of man. Twice at the scene of her death the possibility of her continued existence in society is annulled; first by Matilda—"After robbing her of all that made it dear, can you [Ambrosio] fear to deprive her of a life so miserable?" (Lewis 390)—and only moments later by Antonia, who confirms Matilda's statement:

> She told [Lorenzo], that had She still been undefiled She might have lamented the loss of life; But that deprived of honour and branded with shame, Death was to her a blessing: she could not have been his Wife, and that hope being denied her, She resigned herself to the Grave without one sigh of regret. (Lewis 392)

While Antonia's demise carries with it an egregious double-standard concerning female virtue which would be far too weighty to discuss here, the narrative treats Antonia's death as a necessity by indicating that Antonia, when "[robbed] of all that made" her life "dear," simply cannot integrate with society after her rape. The loss of her sexual innocence was simply too great; the social world of Madrid, in the language of Smith's moral economy, while sympathetic to her tragedy, may never identify with her who was extreme in her perfection and so extreme in her loss thereof:

> But if you have either no fellow-feeling for the misfortunes I have met with, or none that bears any proportion to the grief which distracts me; or

> if you have either no indignation at the injuries I have suffered, or none that bears any proportion to the resentment which transports me, we can no longer converse upon these subjects. We become intolerable to one another. I can neither support your company, nor you mine. (*ToMS* 87)

The Antonia and Ambrosio narratives are sympathetic failures such as Smith describes here, but are, in true Gothic fashion, far more exaggerated. Because the two characters are such (presumed) extraordinary models of moral perfection, the narrative puts them to extraordinary demises that go far beyond the reach of mere human retribution: the impossibly ignorant Antonia meets her demise at the hands of a nearly inhuman man led by the inhuman demon, Matilda, in a scene surrounded by a deathly crowd of corpses (an uncanny crowd which parallels the corruptive crowds in the first chapter). For similar reasons Ambrosio's crimes are punished not by the Inquisition or the crowd, but rather the devil himself. Ambrosio—"This model of piety! This being without reproach! This mortal who placed his puny virtues on a level with those of Angels" (Lewis 439)—for supposing himself above human, meets his doom far from the eyes of any other human when the devil drops him in the mountains. He, far from any society of man, dies in an unnaturally prolonged decay at the base of the cliffs where he falls and is devoured by yet another uncanny crowd of "Myriads of insects" and "Eagles":

> Life still existed in his miserable frame: … Blind, maimed, helpless, and despairing, venting his rage in blasphemy and curses execrating his existence, yet dreading the arrival of death destined to yield him up to greater torments, six miserable days did the Villian languish. (Lewis 442).

Ambrosio, who before “Pitie[d] not his Neighbor’s Failing,” dies grotesquely far from the eyes of any other person (and even loses his own eyes to merciless scavengers); and, with a satisfying finality, the narrative reiterates how, believing himself above his neighbors, Ambrosio may not even suffer amongst them. Even the reader cannot “support [his] company” for the narrative denies us the final lamentations of the broken and dying monk. Though we read *of* his “blasphemy and curses,” the audience is denied—similar to the narrative’s lack of response to the Gypsy’s prophecy—Ambrosio’s thoughts and feelings as he slowly approaches death. Elsewhere in the novel the narrative foregrounds Ambrosio’s short-lived revelations of his own frailty, such as when Ambrosio is first awakened to sexual desire by the newly revealed Matilda: “He shuddered, when He beheld his arguments blazoned in their proper colours, and found that He had been a slave to flattery, to avarice, and self-love” (Lewis 68). At the end, however, his voice and thoughts are not revealed so explicitly. Though we have been expecting Ambrosio’s ultimate moment of recognition of what he previously had “yet to learn, that to an heart unacquainted with her, Vice is ever most dangerous when lurking behind the Mask of Virtue” (Lewis 84), the narrative refuses to reveal his final words and thoughts and thus denies him any Smithian sympathetic connection with society or reader. Ambrosio, deceived by his own supposed elevation above the rest of Madrid’s populace, makes himself “intolerable” and thus the novel, like Madrid and even the Inquisition, cannot maintain a sympathetic connection with him and must leave him in company with his scavenging, inhuman crowd.

The demises of Antonia and Ambrosio, like their earlier visages of perfect innocence, mark out how *The Monk* rests on the Malthusian side of the “organic

perfectibility of man" argument, but takes it to the extreme.[17] Where the reality of misery and vice are for Malthus the two unavoidable and "too bitter ingredients in the cup of human life" (Malthus 21), misery and vice are, for *The Monk,* the real truth behind the "Mask of Virtue."[18] The "bitter ingredients" stem from the so-called "Adam Smith Problem" in which self-interest and mutual sympathy, at a surface level, appear incompatible: self-interest yields market equilibrium (yet another ideal of social-body perfection), but without mutual sympathy, social exchange cannot occur at all ("I can neither support your company, nor you mine"). *The Monk*'s Ambrosio and Antonia models are the equivalent to the self-interest-yields-equilibrium side of the dilemma, but self-interest is exaggerated to isolation and equilibrium to virtue (particularly sexual virtue). The problem here is evident: isolation does not a perfect man make: once pulled into society by the nature of their supposed perfections, the two innocents are stripped of their ignorance and/or delusions and brought to their demise on the altar of humanity. Their deaths—especially Ambrosio's—enact the exaggerated vengeance of spurned sympathy: a sort of karmic, social retribution for the inhuman lack of sympathy Ambrosio showed to Agnes who cries out against his lack of understanding when he discovers her sexual transgression:

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[17] It is necessary to point out that Lewis's satire might adjust our understanding of his actual stance on social perfection. However, authorial intention here must be the subject for another investigation.

[18] The relationships between individual and social, vice and virtue, private and public, and etc. in the texts of Lewis, Malthus, Smith, and Godwin can all be interpreted as the performativity in power/crowd behavior. See Canetti 373-379 on the mask as a performative element of power: "The mask is perfect because it stands alone, leaving everything behind it in shadow; the more distinct it is, the darker everything else. No-one knows what may not bust forth from behind the mask. The tension created by the contrast between its appearance and the secret it hides can become extreme. This is the real reason for the terror the mask inspires. 'I am exactly what you see' it proclaims 'and everything you fear is behind me.' The mask fascinates and, at the same time, enforces distance" (Canetti 376).

> "By all that is sacred, by all that is most dear to you, I supplicate, I entreat…."
>
> "Release me! I will not hear you. Where is the Domina?"

Refusing to "hear" the supplications of Agnes, who has been wrongfully forced to take her vows as a nun and pregnant with the child of the Marquis de las Cisternas, curses him for his lack of sympathy:

> "Hear me, Proud, Stern, and Cruel! You could have saved me; you could have restored me to happiness and virtue, but would not! … Insolent in your yet-shaken virtue, you disdained the prayers of a Penitent; But God will show mercy, though you show none. And where is the merit of your boasted virtue? What temptations have you vanquished? Coward! you have fled from it, not opposed seduction. But the day of Trial will arrive! Oh! then when you yield to impetuous passions! when you feel that Man is weak, and born to err; … Think upon your Cruelty! Think upon Agnes, and despair of pardon!" (Lewis 48-49)

Agnes's curse goes beyond prefacing Ambrosio's failure to see how "Man is weak and born to err"; in cursing him the narrative projects his later isolation—he will flee the punishment and society of man just as he has "fled" from "seduction." Moreover, Agnes's demand to "Think upon your Cruelty" makes the narrative silence at his death even more striking. There seems to be, between Agnes's prognostication and Ambrosio's inhuman demise a narrative indication that by rejecting and belittling his "neighbors" he commits his most egregious crime—indeed, a crime so terrible that it becomes literally unspeakable at the criminal's death. This is an odd notion, considering the other, heinous

crimes he commits, but the narrative privileges Ambrosio's supposed isolation from the crowd and his deception of the people of Madrid over the crimes of incest, rape, and murder. It is as if Ambrosio must "despair of pardon" not just from God, but from Agnes and all the others he has wronged through lack of "mercy" and "boasted virtue."

The crowd is what moderates the moral economy of *The Monk*'s Madrid. E. P. Thompson uses this term "moral economy" to describe the plebian legitimization of the many food riots during the eighteenth-century:

> It is possible to detect in almost every eighteenth-century crowd action some legitimizing notion. By the notion of legitimation I mean that the men and women in the crowd were informed by the belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs; and, in general, that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community. On occasion this popular consensus was endorsed by some measure of license afforded by the authorities. More commonly, the consensus was so strong that it overrode motives of fear or deference. (Thompson 188)

While it is the devil who brings Ambrosio to his ultimate fall, his punishment is the response to Ambrosio's actions against and deceptions of Agnes, Antonia, his mother Elvira, and all of Madrid, whose punishment, as the prioress discovers, could be all the worse for those who transgress against the moral code. Ambrosio's silent and isolated death contrasts with the prioress's demise at the hands of the mob. In drawing the contrasting punishments, the narrative is conscious of how the violence would have been far greater had the mob been present for the revelation of Ambrosio's crimes: so much greater that the hypothetical violence is unspeakable. Matilda, for instance, tells

Ambrosio that she chooses the eternal company of the devil over the justice of the mob: "Oh! my Friend, to expire in such torments! To die amidst curses and execrations! To bear the insults of an exasperated Mob! To be exposed to all the mortifications of shame and infamy! Who can reflect without horror on such a doom?" (Lewis 428). The retribution of the mob is the worse of two possible evils, and Ambrosio, like Matilda, chooses destruction at the hands of the devil to be saved from the anger of the mob, which is endowed with a sublime force of justice on a level more terrible than heaven or hell.

**"[P]opular fury" or The Fearsome Aggregate**

David Collings, writing on Burke's horrified response to and prediction of the French revolution, argues how the mob comes to embody the sublime through countering and defying the powers of law and nation:

> Burke's discussion of fealty suggests that the mob is not itself sublime but oversteps proper bounds out of an incapacity to be moved by mitigated forms of terror. The assault on their majesties is caused by an aesthetic crisis, the immunity to the appeal of the sublime and beautiful. But Burke's horrified response to his imaginary mob points beyond such aesthetic failure toward another possibility that he does not wish to recognize: rather than failing to grasp the sublime, the mob *inverts* it, causing monarchs and loyalists to tremble under the threat of a contrary overwhelming force. His hyperbolic rhetoric suggest that the crowd, by refusing to be moved *by* the sublime, *becomes* a sublime force in its own

> right: repudiating its subjection to a higher force and refusing its subjection to deferred death, it takes on a grandeur of its own. (Collings 71, original emphasis)

Lewis fashions the crowd in *The Monk* on very similar lines, but instead of positioning the mob as a counter-power to institutional power (the Church in Lewis's scenario), the crowd is benevolent creator, compliant subject, and violent regulator of institutions. The mob is not a "*contrary* overwhelming force" (my emphasis) but rather a component to the official powers that the mob threatens without losing any of its sublime effect. Even as the prioress is threatened with the deadly, godly power of the Inquisition and is as good as punished already, the enraged crowd inflicts its own grotesque punishment on the corrupt woman without trial or even the prioress's response to Ursula's accusation: if they had waited, the Madrileños would have realized that Ursula was wrong on the account of Agnes's murder as she is still (barely) alive and only imprisoned. Their fury matches if not overwhelms the sublimity of the Church and the Inquisition: "[Ramirez] threatened the Mob with the vengeance of the Inquisition: But in this moment of popular phrenzy even this dreadful name had lost its effect" (Lewis 356). Furthermore, the mob quickly transfers its fury from the prioress to the convent and other nuns before Lorenzo and his companions can shake off their wonderment: "Unable to prevent this shocking event, Lorenzo and his Friends had beheld it with the utmost horror: But they were roused from their compelled inactivity, on hearing that the Mob was attacking the Convent of St. Clare" (Lewis 356).

Their moment of "compelled inactivity" provokes a confusion of identity occurring in which Lorenzo and Ramirez's men struggle to remain independent from the

crowd's influence. This is particularly poignant when Lorenzo recognizes his own involvement in the disaster and his mixed emotions regarding the violence of the mob against the prioress: "Though regret for his Sister had made him look upon the Prioress with abhorrence, Lorenzo could not help pitying a Woman in a situation so terrible" (Lewis 356). Not only does their own violence to quell the madness lead to further rampage, but they succumb, in that sublime moment of "compelled inactivity," to the will of the crowd as if mesmerized.[19] Adding to this is the peculiar one-ness of the crowd created by the unspecified use of "They," "Some," and "Others" as the narrator depicts the mob's actions:

> They battered the walls, threw lighted torches in at the windows, and swore that by break of day not a Nun of St. Clare's order should be left alive. Lorenzo had just *succeeded* in piercing his way through the Crowd, when one of the Gates was forced open. The Rioters poured into the interior part of the Building, where they *exercised* their vengeance upon every thing which found itself in their passage. They broke the furniture into pieces, tore down the pictures, destroyed the reliques, and in their hatred of her Servant forgot all respect to the Saint. Some *employed* themselves in searching out the Nuns, Others in pulling down parts of the

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[19] Carson analyzes this moment as recognition of the Other, particularly in the form of women or slaves; thereby, Carson connects Gothic horror of the crowd with the commodification and possession of humans. See Carson 75-104. Collings, on the other hand, would call this a moment of sexualized *"jouisance,"*or ecstacy, in which Lorenzo and his companions are transfixed in sexualized horror not unlike Raymond's transfixion during his encounters with the Bleeding nun: "The most astonishing version of this fascination in Lewis's tale comes about when Rayond encounters an impossible embodiement, in response to which he must recognize something alien in his own body as well. … Overwhelmed with horror, absolutely fascinated, for the duration of her visits he becomes a virtual corpse himself" (Collings 152-154).

> Convent, and Others again in setting fire to the pictures and valuable furniture, which it contained. These Latter *produced* the most *decisive* desolation: Indeed the consequences of their action were more sudden, than themselves had expected or wished. (Lewis 357, *my emphasis*)

While the Mob is madly obfuscated in "They" identification, its intentions are distinctive and precise in the narrator's use of 'work' language and an aggressively active voice. There are no individuals but groups of individuals making swift decisions as if of one mind, wreaking havoc in a brutally efficient manner. So we might read Lorenzo and his company's stunned horror from earlier as a sort of mental takeover of the individual by the masses. It is not just that their minds are stopped by the horror of the scene, but by a mental indecision between two equally strong motives; they are torn between the vengeful intentions of the crowd and the need to maintain order and deliver the prioress to the Inquisition. The mesmerized Lorenzo is not paralyzed by fear *of* the violent mob, but by his own role *within* the crowd by initiating the outrage: "Lorenzo was shocked at having been the cause, however innocent, of this frightful disturbance" (Lewis 358).

The mob which ransacks the convent of St. Clare is also the same crowd that squeezed into the church to listen, rapt, to the Madrid idol, Ambrosio, and it is the one celebrating the feast of St. Clare before the prioress's crimes are revealed. Both a part of the convent and against it, the crowd is not just Collings's "plebian counterpower" (Collings 14), a revolutionary force that stands in opposition to the institution, but is rather the institution itself wreaking havoc on the crimes of individuals in support of community values. That is, the mob's violent judgment on the prioress and the convent is enacted in support of the moral goals of the convent itself as the community center. In

fact, when Don Ramirez "challenged [the Domina] as his Prisoner" and before Ursula narrates the crimes of the prioress, the crowd initially prepares to defend the prioress as the Church's representative:

> For a moment amazement held the Domina silent and immoveable: But no sooner did She recover herself, than the She exclaimed against sacrilege and impiety, and called the People to rescue a Daughter of the Church. They were eagerly preparing to obey her; when Don Ramirez, protected by the Archers from their rage, commanded them to forbear, and threatened them with the severest vengeance of the Inquisition. At that dreaded word every arm fell, every sword shrunk back into its scabbard. The prioress herself turned pale, and trembled. The general silence convinced her that She had nothing to hope but from innocence[.] (Lewis 349)

The crowd, while it will later punish the Domina with as much severity as it can muster, initially seeks to protect the "Daughter of the Church" from Lorenzo, Don Ramirez, and the soldiers. They fall into "general silence," however, when Don Ramirez invokes the even more powerful representative of the Church, the holy Inquisition. The mob then turns from protector to punisher, when it is then revealed that Don Ramirez's accusation is not a secular attack on the church, but a trial by the Church on one of its own representatives. The implication, before and after the Domina's crimes are revealed, is that the mob is an active participant in the regulatory powers and defense of the holy Church—an institution which they themselves create, yield to, participate in, and, if necessary, protect or even punish. While at first the Inquisition is used to delay the

actions of the mob, it is later ignored as if even that deadly institutional power is trumped by power of the Church's subjects. The lack of action against any of the rioters later on seems to support this as well. Don Ramirez chooses that

> the populace should remain ignorant both of the crimes and profession of the Captives [i.e. Matilda and Ambrosio]. He feared a repetition of the riots which had followed the apprehending the Prioress of St. Clare. He contented himself with stating to the Capuchins, the guilt of their Superior. To avoid the shame of a public accusation, and dreading the popular fury from which they had already saved their Abbey with much difficulty, the Monks readily permitted the Inquisitors to search their Mansion without noise. … Every thing else remained in its former position, and order and tranquility once more prevailed through Madrid. (Lewis 394)

As if the mob was, at least partially, justified in its actions, Don Ramirez and the "Inquisitors" treat the destructive crowd with care for fear of more devastation. Though the narrative records the savagery of the riot in itemized detail and the narrator appears to disdain the aggressive populace, little or no retribution against the rioters is made, nor is there any indication of remorse from those actors. The narrative simply moves on as if the "united ravages of the Mob," while unusual, were entirely justifiable. Though the mob is "blinded by [its] resentment," the mob is not reprehensible for the riot, but rather merely the expected responder to the public unveiling of a heinous criminal from within *its* Church.

The Madrid crowd functions as a self-regulating force for the community similar to the food rioters E. P. Thompson discusses:

> It is the restraint, rather than the disorder which is remarkable; and there can be no doubt that the actions [of the rioters] were approved by an overwhelming popular consensus. There is a deeply-felt conviction that prices *ought*, in times of dearth, to be regulated, and that the profiteer put himself outside of society. … We need only point to this continuing motif of popular intimidation, when men and women near to starvation nevertheless attacked mills and granaries, not to steal the food, but to punish the proprietors. (Thompson 229-232)

Thompson mentions that this seemingly backwards reaction by rioters (destroying granaries not to obtain sustenance but rather to "punish the proprietors") is neither idiocy nor a sort of hunger-mania, as the gentry and upper classes would claim, but is rather an organized and rational regulating act backed by moral consensus. This is perhaps the reason behind Lorenzo's moment of difficulty in choosing between "pity" for the prioress or the satisfaction of the justice enacted on her. Yet another moment of self- versus community-interest, Lorenzo is stumbling over the seemingly contradictory methods of mob-justice. Lewis does little or nothing to ease this concern—if anything, he exaggerates the mob's vehemence and the lack of reprehensibility of the rioters to complicate the reader's emotional response to the severity of the mob's justice.

The influence and power of the crowd on the novel's Church-centered community and the aesthetic impact on the reader distinguishes it as a sublime power: adhering specifically to the parameters set by Burke in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) and reinforced by Gothic aesthetic treatises such as the Aikin siblings' "On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror; with Sir

Bertrand, A Fragment" (1773). Especially after 1800, the sublime is "effectively synonymous with dramatic natural phenomena, with mountains and oceans, storms and deserts, the so-called natural sublime" (Duffy and Howell, 1) or, less commonly, with the numinous or the aesthetic experience of the divine. Hence crowds are not generally the first object brought to mind at the mention of the aesthetic concept of the sublime. However, the crowd in Lewis's Gothic features all of the expected characteristics of the Burkean sublime. In their anthology focusing on broader influences and conceptions of the sublime aesthetic (*Cultures of the Sublime: Selected Readings, 1750-1830* (2011)) Cian Duffy and Peter Howell dedicate an entire chapter to the sublimity of crowds in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writings:[20]

> writing about the crowd reveals that being part of a mass of people can involve the loss of individuated identity, in a two-way process which parallels cotemporary models of the encounter with the sublime, and with the natural sublime in particular. This loss is both belittling for the individual, because of the mass of activity of people and minds all around, and also self-aggrandising, because the individual feels that they have become part of a greater whole. Observing or contemplating a crowd of which one is not a part can similarly be both frightening and exciting, awe-inspiring and exhilarating, as great numbers of humans become one mass, to threaten or inspire the onlooker, as befits the moment. Such experience can also elude representation, because its power and

[20] Their collection of Crowd texts is one of six chapters in the anthology on the cultural variations of the sublime: the others being Mountains, Money, Mind, Gothic, and the Exotic.

> complexity transcends the normal experience of the individual. (Duffy and Howell 151)

The sublimity of the crowd and its "loss of individuated identity" comes, as Duffy and Howell explain, from the transition between a collection of individuals to a singular, powerful "mass." That is, the move from a knowable, countable set of individuals to an unknowable, innumerable, and threatening power. The "mass" becomes sublime through the emotional reaction of Terror that, according to Burke's taxonomy, might be caused by characteristics of obscurity, vastness, uniformity, and suddenness.[21]

Even on a linguistic level a crowd embodies obscurity via "linguistic fluidity," "semantic fluctuations," or "inherent unfixity" (Plotz 6-7). A "crowd," like "people" and "mob" (common terms in the culminating scene in *The Monk*—others being "rioters" and "populace"), is created by multiple individuals yet functions grammatically in the singular. It is both verb and noun, both object and action; may have either a negative or neutral (in some instances, positive) emotional quality; and has historically defied attempts to define the requisite number of individuals which constitute the crowd.[22] Given a mere mention of *crowd*, there is no way to capture the number or quality of its people, mood, or the manner of action occurring, let alone the purpose of that body. Just like the language surrounding it, a crowd is naturally cloaked by its very definition:

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[21] Another cause of Sublimity is "loudness," which is a feature of the crowd in the novel that reaches beyond the scope of this paper. At the scene of the mob, the voices of the enraged populace are described as of one great voice, just as they are of one mind. The narrative calls the noise of the crowd "general" (Lewis 350) on several occasions, and the noise it makes is often narrated in the singular: "the indignation of the Mob" (Lewis 355) and "a general cry" and "an explanation was demanded loudly" (Lewis 350).

[22] It also carries two additional semantic definitions of "crypt" (think, Antonia surrounded by her deathly crowd in the convent's crypts) and an archaic type of fiddle. See "crowd, v.1," "crowd, n.1," "crowd, n.2," and "crowd, n.3" *OED Online* (Oxford: March 2014). See also Plotz 5-7.

"what is it? is it not, wrapt up in the shades of its own incomprehensible darkness[?]" (Burke 63). But it is not merely the obscurity of the crowd that causes it to embody the sublime. As we have seen from the opening chapter, the moment when the Domina cries out for help in the name of a "Daughter of the Church," and then finally in the scene of her and the convent's destruction, a crowd has both power and suddenness: in Canetti's words, "[i]n [the crowd's] spontaneous form it is a sensitive thing. The openness which enables it to grow is at the same time, its danger." (Canetti 16). The spontaneous growth and decay of the crowd and its tendency towards violence stem from how it "remains hungry as long as there is one human being it has not reached" (Canetti 22), regardless of whether to include that last human being or persecute them. The notion of absorption by the "hungry" crowd suggests both a satisfaction in joining the crowd but also a potential danger of becoming a part of its uniformity and single-minded "biological state" (Canetti 22). It is this hunger to absorb that appears to motivate the manner in which the Domina's body, even after she is unconscious and later dead, continues to be mutilated "till it became no more than a mass of flesh, unsightly, shapeless, and disgusting" (Lewis 356). In seeking to destroy the prioress, the mob also fulfills its hunger to include her in its own *obscure* and *uniform* and "shapeless" "mass of flesh." In similar language the mob is said to be "confounding the innocent with the guilty" (Lewis 356-357) and "in their hatred of her Servant forgot all respect to the Saint" whom she and the other nuns represented.

The manner in which individual selves are grotesquely absorbed into the crowd, regardless of whether they are sinner or saint or the punished or the punisher (or mere onlooker), recalls the earlier problem with Ambrosio and Antonia's impossible perfection and the way they are both created by isolation and yet fated to be corrupted by society

because of their extraordinary, virtuous states. Even for Lorenzo and his "party" (yet another odd mass noun in play in the mob scene) (Lewis 344), the struggle to remain separate from the conflagration becomes overwhelming. In *The Monk* it is near impossible to avoid one's consumption by or consummation with the "popular phrenzy" (Lewis 356), creating something similar to Frankenstein's monster who, rather than a new creation or new body, "inhabit[s] a mass that is not *a* body but an assembly of parts" (Collings 201), that is, an "assembly" of dead parts. The amalgamation of bodies (dead bodies in Lewis's and Shelley's Gothics) into the "mass of flesh," must "[l]ike the body of the creature…[require] the desecration of individual bodies" (Collings 202), creating, as Collings defines it, a "monstrous society" (Collings 202).[23]

The monstrosity of the populace is sublime not just for its grotesque and single-minded consumption of individual selfhood but also for its very presence as a dangerous, self-immolating body, which is physically dangerous to its individuals by virtue of its numbers alone. This is made painfully obvious to the rioters in Lewis's mob when the fires started *by* the crowd consequently threaten the lives of the rioters ransacking the convent:

> The Flames rising from the burning piles caught part of the Building, which being old and dry, the conflagration spread with rapidity from room to room. The Walls were soon shaken by the devouring element: the

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[23] See also Tuite 142: "it is the strategy of Shelley's feminist romance politics and poetic pitted against Malthus's refiguring and regendering of a monstrous sublime as a reproductive excess enabled by the abjectness of the female. Frankenstein's monster is a dialectical representation of the abject female—an emasculated laboring-class male denied the right of reproduction. The novel's master trope of illegitimacy engages the Malthusian monster of illegitimacy—illegitimate reproduction as a diabolical propensity of the laboring classes—which Malthus tropes as overpopulation."

> Columns gave way: and the Roofs came tumbling down upon the Rioters, and crushed many of them beneath their weight. … The Convent was wrapped in flames, and the whole presented a scene of devastation and horror. … [T]he sudden and alarming progress of the flames compelled him [Lorenzo] to provide for his own safety. The People now hurried out, as eagerly as they had before thronged in[.] (Lewis 357-358)

What makes this scene especially poignant is how fire is a recognized symbol for the crowd. As such, in Lewis's mob scene, the crowd creates the fire which then works to destroy the crowd; hence, the narration implies that the crowd/fire is its own self-destructing force.[24] Canetti explains this phenomena as a panic, described as a violent "disintegration" of a crowd in which the fire metonymically represents the crowd for its "common unmistakable danger [that] creates a common fear" (Canetti 26) causing the individual's "boundaries of his own person [to] become clear to him again":

> The people he pushes away are like burning objects to him; their touch is hostile, and on every part of his body; and it terrifies him. Anyone who stands in his way is tainted with the general hostility of fire. The manner in which fire spreads and gradually works its way round a person until he is entirely surrounded by it is very similar to the crowd threatening him on all sides. The incalculable movements within it, the thrusting forth of an

[24] A similar situation to Shelley's novel: Frankenstein creates his monster out of a crowd of corpses only to be essentially destroyed by his creation.

> arm, a fist or a leg, are like the flames of a fire which may suddenly spring up on any side. (Canetti 27)[25]

The connection of fire and crowd in Lewis's novel plays well with the Gothic mode: notably the Gothic obsession with space. The problem of the fire and the crowd is also a spatial one: the crowd/fire threat would not be a threat at all if occurring in an open space, which Canetti makes sure to note in his example of a theatre fire, saying "If they were not in a theatre, people could flee together like a herd of animals in danger, and increase the impetus of their flight by the simultaneity of identical movements" (Canetti 26). In a confined space, such as the convent which has moral and social limitations in addition to physical ones, a crowd "disintegrates" once the individual is brutally reminded of the danger to himself when the "sudden and alarming progress" of the fire shocks him back into himself and he must then fight to save himself from both flame and neighbor. When the fire begins to bring down the convent, the crowd, once so decisive in its single-minded ferocity and single-bodied movement, turns into a rabble of separate bodies "clogging" (Lewis 358) the exits.

This conflict between individual, social, and spatial in the sublime makes a statement that has the potential to change existing notions of Gothic spaces. Traditionally Gothic spaces are viewed as sublime for their enormity, darkness, and labyrinthine obscurity. However, when the crowd is added to space, the frightening aspect is not the space itself but that which it fails to support. Such moments occur in Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), where it is not just space but its byproducts of capacity

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[25] See also Canetti 75-90 for a detailed look at fire and other crowd symbols which include the forest, river, sea, corn, rain, wind, treasure, and heap.

and productivity which cause similar conflicts between individual and crowd: for example, the moment when Adeline, accompanying La Luc to the coast, remarks on the poverty and lack of space she finds in Nice:

> In this blooming region Adeline observed that the countenances of the peasants, meagre and discontented, formed a melancholy contrast to the face of the country, and she lamented again the effects of an arbitrary government, where the bounties of nature, which were designed for all, are monopolized by a few, and the many are suffered to starve tantalized by surrounding plenty.
>
> The city lost much of its enchantment on a nearer approach: its narrow streets and shabby houses but ill answered the expectation which a distant view of its ramparts and its harbor, gay with vessels, seemed to authorise. The appearance of the inn at which La Luc now alighted did not contribute to soften his disappointment; but if he was surprised to find such indifferent accommodation at the inn of a town so celebrated as the resort of valetudinarians, he was still more so when he learned the difficulty of procuring furnished lodgings.

In Nice, expecting to find restorative sea air and a magnificent, “celebrated” town, La Luc and Adeline find the individual “countenances” of the starving peasants and the too-real difficulties to find their own space to lodge shocking in “contrast to the face of the country.” Tucked away between one of the many sublime travelogue descriptions and Adeline’s juvenile romanticism, this is a not infrequent moment of the Sublime of population pressures witnessed by the writers of the 1790s’ Gothic: forging a unique and

only partially distorted form of realism. In the same era when Burke feared for the monarchy facing the terrible French mob and Malthus warned of impending mass starvations, the Gothic took on these pressures and squeezed them into Gothic chambers. Further attention to the role of population pressures in these works should cause critics to reconsider the definition of a Gothic space. Even a full three decades previous to the writing of Lewis, Radcliffe, and Shelley, Horace Walpole's cryptic premonition at the start of *The Castle of Otranto* (1763) implies more than the destruction of Manfred but that of a society when they should be "too large": "*the castle and lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it"* (Walpole 17).

For Malthus, like Lewis, a lack of space (and its resources) is the ultimate stimulant to population pressure.[26] It is this lack that any economist would term "scarcity" and what in *The Monk* becomes an absolute: recall, again, the initial opening to the novel where "to seek for true devotion would be a *fruitless* attempt" and where "*[e]very* corner was filled, *every* seat was occupied" (my emphasis). Lewis's Gothic, one which is delightfully over-exaggerated in nearly every way, manages to envision a real social problem in unrealistic bounds—almost mimicking the very work the political economists were likewise attempting. While the notion of revolution in the novel's crowd is certainly relevant, it is less revolution and more population at large that is modeled in Gothic garb. This, I argue, is due to the relationship between the mob and the convent

[26] Malthus notes the rapid increase of population in the United States, saying that the broadly unused resources and land contributed to such rapid increase without the need of reductive "checks" (vice and misery) to that expansion. See Malthus 46-50.

they destroy. The reaction of the crowd against the prioress is less an example of a revolutionary counterpower against a corrupt institution than it is a representation of the interdependency of populace and institution, individual and social. This relationship, as we see from both Lewis's and Malthus's, work is both beneficial and injurious, but never entirely unavoidable. It is this interdependence that resists the counterpower/revolution sublime for which Collings (among others) argues and can actually preface a stronger connection to different population concerns that have less of a connection to the French Revolution in particular. More work must be done with the Gothic novels, and other works, of the 1790s to reveal the many sides of the population dialogue with its numerous social impacts. For this reason, I will turn to the "mathematical sublime" that occurs in financial panic, which, I argue, is as reasonable a critical parallel to the mob scene in *The Monk* as revolution.

**Panics: the financial sublime**

An anonymous writer for *The Oracle and Public Advertiser* under the segment heading of "The Public Funds" on January 15, 1796, made the following cryptic remarks:

> We have long observed, with regret, that the business of the STOCK EXCHANGE was too much enveloped in mystery for a business of such importance. Millions of money are won and lost and thousands are ruined, while others are enriched by the vibration which natural events or artificial news occasion; and yet many, even those speculators, who are thought to be intelligent men, know no more of the subject than to follow the crowd, or copy some KNOWING ONES in their speculations. These modes of

> acting are dangerous in the extreme; for by the time that such men begin to speculate on a rise the fall is just about beginning, and *vice versa*, respecting a contrary speculation. ("The Public Funds")

This image of the "mystery" of the Stock Exchange and its seemingly arbitrary financial effects is a wonderful example of the sort of language which labels finance not only in Lewis's 1790s but across time from the advent of the national debt to today. Especially of interest to my argument is how the writer recognizes the intertwining roles of the crowd and the individual in the "vibration" of the financial markets and the lamentable lack of knowledge of the markets' participants: even the most intelligent "know no more of the subject than to follow the crowd." Here we encounter, again, the danger of following the crowd, and, as before, the institution (the Stock Exchange) is a "business of such importance" to the community it is created for and by, and is better left intact than otherwise. Though the institution is notoriously unstable and mysterious, it is necessary to the economy at large; the *Oracle* writer "endeavour[s] to explain the causes of the rises and falls which take place in that restless political machine; which, though it is unsteady and vibrating, gives a regularity and solidity to the State, that, until the existence of national debt, it never before enjoyed" ("The Public Funds"). The irony is lost on the *Oracle*'s writer: we are still "endeavouring" to explain the "restless political machine" to this day.[27]

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[27] Mary Poovey traces the advent and early development of written forms that attempted to explain the mysteries of the economic and financial systems in *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain* (2008). She writes that these early attempts to demystify economics were more closely related to the literature of the time than economic and financial writing is today.

Attempting to explain, or even define, the phenomenon of the financial crisis is no easy task, as the financial event known as a crisis is linguistically plagued by its very characteristics of hysteria and instability. Charles P. Kindleberger's basic anatomy of a crisis is a relatively lucid place to start:

> What happens, basically, is that some event changes the economic outlook. New opportunities for profits are seized, and overdone, in ways so closely resembling irrationality as to constitute a mania. Once the excessive character of the upswing is realized, the financial system experiences a sort of "distress," in the course of which the rush to reverse the expansion process may become so precipitous as to resemble panic. In the manic phase, people of wealth or credit switch out of money or borrow to buy real or illiquid financial assets. In panic, the reverse movement takes place, from real or financial assets to money, or repayment of debt, with a crash in the prices of commodities, houses, buildings, land, stocks, bonds—in short, whatever has been the subject of the mania. (Kindleberger 5)

Add to this economic historian Julian Hoppit's qualification of how "[c]rises are produced by sudden alterations of expectations" in the mind of the investors. These expectations can be "rooted partly in reality and partly in the imagination." That is, expectations in the rise or fall of prices of commodities or stocks can come from rumored events or hearsay as easily as from solid point of fact or real events (Hoppit 41). Note the language which surrounds the concept of a financial crisis in Kindleberger's and Hoppit's definitions as well as the image given by the *Oracle*. The terms "mania" and "panic" are

obvious examples of how financial events were (and are) perceived; the participants' activity is connected to mental illness and excitability and the activity to uncertainty and spontaneity. "[I]rrationality," "distress," "excessive," "unstable," "precipitous," "strained," and others also support the association of financial crisis with instability of both the mental and structural kinds. Moreover, the paranoia and mania is at a community level. It is not a gaggle of individuals engaging in possibly delusional financial decisions, but a huge number of people participating in a sort of mass hysteria responding to triggers "partly in reality and partly in the imagination."

The side effects (and frequently the causes) of financial panics, inflation and deflation, also play a role in this madness. Inflation and deflation have to do with how the purchasing power of a unit of monetary exchange—such as a coin or bank note—is decreased or increased according to the total amount of money in circulation. That is, the more total wealth an economy has, the lower the value of one of that economy's single monetary units and vice versa. This inverse relationship between total wealth and buying power is one reason why Canetti focuses on how money—specifically "treasure"—is a symbol for the crowd just as fire is a symbol for the crowd: "it is felt to be a unit; one can come on it without knowing exactly how much it really contains" (Canetti 184). But unlike fire and other crowd symbols, money is also characterized by how "the individuality of its units is always emphatically stressed. Each coin has a clear and firm edge and its own specific weight … often it has the head of a ruler stamped on it … People like imagining a coin as an individual" (Canetti 184). The same goes for paper money and even credit: a unit of money has a distinctive value but en masse can be discussed in singular units made of an indistinct, even uncountable number of monies:

"Just as one can go on counting upwards to any figure, so money can be devalued downwards to any depth" (Canetti 186). It is no surprise, here, how money, like the crowd, can be viewed as a sublime force, especially when the individual, who depends on his coin, must suffer the effects of financial up- and down-swings. If the coin is representative of the individual person and treasure a symbol for the crowd, then the concept of individual value versus aggregate wealth becomes problematic when fluctuations occur in the system at large:

> This process contains that urge [of a crowd] to rapid and unlimited growth which I have characterized as one of the most important and striking psychological attributes of the crowd. But here the growth negates itself; as the crowd grows, its units become weaker and weaker. What used to be one Mark is first called 10,000, then 100,000, then a million. The identification of the individual with his mark is thus broken, for the latter is no longer fixed and stable, but changes from one moment to the next. It is no longer like a person; it has no continuity and it has less and less value. A man who has come to rely on it cannot help feeling its degradation as his own. (Canetti 186)

Add to this the madness of the financial mania, in which a huge mass of people seek first to buy and then—when the tide of the mania turns to panic—sell (or sell and then buy) in an excitable market. In a boiling sea of rising and falling values of the individual unit mixed with the madness of the expectations of gain or the fear and anger of loss, the financial markets are difficult to separate from the image of a riot or mob like the one that

*The Monk* envisions. Even Lorenzo's actions in the crowd appear uncannily similar to the behavior of many an investor:

> He entered [the convent] with the Mob, and exerted himself to repress the prevailing Fury, till the sudden and alarming progress of the flames compelled him to provide for his own safety. The People now hurried out, as eagerly as they had before thronged in; But their numbers clogging up the door-way, and the fire gaining upon them rapidly, many of them perished ere they had time to effect their escape. (Lewis 358)

Though Lorenzo's motive is clearly different—because he seeks to quell the "Fury" rather than profit from it—than the mob-makers, his role is not altogether different from an investor who first attempts to seize on an opportunity only to just as quickly exit before his anticipated gain becomes a loss instead. Likewise, while the mob in Lewis's novel is enraged, it is not unlike a mass of investors acting on dreams of fortune and easy success: they create the scenario that will eventually spur their own destruction. [28]

Further, there is a figurative link between financial and emotional "crisis" to narrative "crisis": a connection between the financial narrative and a fictional narrative

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[28] Missing in this scenario is the financial schemer—someone who seeks to increase the "Fury" to profit by those who know no better. I suggest in Lewis's novel this role is perhaps filled by the crafty Matilda, who manages to warn (sadly to little actual profit) Ambrosio of his danger of discovery when the mob enters the convent and Lorenzo and his company begin searching the vaults and tombs, saying "the Monks seek for you everywhere. They imagine, that your authority alone will suffice to calm this disturbance… I profited by the confusion, and fled hither to warn you of the danger" (Lewis 389). Matilda, who also incites the corruption of Ambrosio and thus the demise of Antonia, is not unlike the scheming and false financiers and con-men in Trollope's much later financial plot *The Way We Live Now*, who "float" the railway company seeking riches to the great loss of many unwary investors. I believe Matilda and even Lucifer in Lewis's novel are similar to the financial forgers and schemers that have been analyzed by critics such as Sara Malton.

that is more elaborate than shared jargon.[29] A number of literary works have chronicled the rise and fall of financial crises in narrative, such as the "The Autobiography of a Joint-Stock Company (Limited)" (1876) by Laurence Oliphant, a scathing fictional representation of the dubious rise of the Credit Foncier and Mobilier of England and its eventual bankruptcy in 1877, or Eliza Haywood's *Memoirs of a certain island adjacent to the Kingdom of Utopia* (1726), which allegorizes the South Sea Bubble—in which a scandalous community is convinced to toss their riches down a well. While these two narratives are far more explicit literary renditions of a financial crisis, I argue that Lewis's *The Monk* might be viewed as a similar representation of mania and panic within a financial system; *The Monk*'s crowd narrative follows the same narrative arc from rising mania to crisis to falling panic while engaging in a topic of community insanity. We can see this in the mob scene: the mob, enraged and empowered at the realization of the prioress's crimes, rushes to "seize" the convent and all that it contains but in its massive aggression starts the fire which will, only moments later, have them rushing back out of the convent to save themselves from the conflagration.

When viewed through Lewis's novel, the financial panic, with its language of instability, mystery, and madness, along with its implications on the shifting value of the individual within the crowd, reveals a sublimity worthy of the Gothic narrative. Like the French Revolution, financial panic would have seemed unfathomable and dangerous to the average person in the 1790s, but the phenomena of financial panic is also mesmeric

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[29] I would hardly be the first to note this connection. See McGann, "Literary Realism in the Wake of Business Cycle Theory: *The Way We Live Now*"; Zimmerman, *Panic! Markets, Crises, & Crowds in American Fiction* (2006); Anthony, "'Gone Distracted': 'Sleepy Hollow,' Gothic Masculinity, and the Panic of 1819"; and Poovey, "Writing about Finance in Victorian England: Disclosure and Secrecy in the Culture of Investment."

for both its fantastic excitability and for the potential to make an occasional, lucky man monstrously rich ("Millions of money are won and lost and thousands are ruined, while others are enriched by the vibration").[30] The mesmerism of the financial event comes from the potential of wealth and the uncertainty of its operations in combination with implications on the community of the "Nation," a relatively new concept of community, institution, and state. While it is the crowd that creates and moves the mysterious financial system, it is that same crowd that has the potential to bring it crashing down, threatening the position of individual and Nation alike.

## Conclusion

Malthus's *Essay* made major waves as we well know and mostly for its negativity. Malthus stood in opposition to the Enlightenment thinkers and moral philosophers who viewed the populace as an asset and not burden to the Nation; and thus he inflamed debates over the role of the individual in the economy, especially in terms of self-interest, labor, and what would later be labeled as human capital. For instance, where Smith viewed self-interest positively for its contribution to the greater wealth of a social body ("Even the weakest and the worst of them are not altogether without their utility" (*ToMS* 253)), Malthus saw that same self-interest as double-edged: self-interest leads to

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[30] Even the day-to-day stock market operations were mysterious and incomprehensible. Take for instance, Thomas Mortimer's *Every Man His Own Broker; or, A Guide to Exchange-Alley* (1761) where the narrator struggles to find the words to describe the madness and the tumult in the "famous college of jobbers" where "that horrid din of confused voices; and that motley appearance of various characters … consists of such a medley of news, quarrels, prices of different funds, calling of names, adjusting of accounts, &c. &c. continually circulating in an intermixed chaos of confusion. … Shall I invoke the comic muse; and in her lively vein of humour expose the deformity of the sons of iniquity? No, the characters are too low, the subject too mean, and the plots too dirty." See Duffy and Howell 57-58.

market equilibrium but also to social miseries of famine, disease, and vice. The Gothic takes the Malthusian negativity a step further. By envisioning the crowd as monstrous, the Gothic perceives the populace not just as an economic, political, and moral burden, but as a force of sublime power on par with nature or divinity. If, as I found in *The Monk*'s crowds, the crowd is not primarily a representation of revolution in the literature of the 1790s, what else may have sparked these empowering images of the populace that we find in the Gothic? Why does Gothic literature choose to represent the crowd as so powerful, so violent in its instrumental prowess over the institution?

The relationship between population and Gothic literature during the 1790s and beyond has been understudied. Hence, this thesis remains a small fragment in a much larger puzzle. Though we have a wealth of historical and sociological research on the crowds of the 1790s—thanks to E.P. Thompson, Elias Canetti, and George Rudé—there is much to be gained from further study of the role of crowds and population in the Gothic: for instance, architectures and urbanism in the Gothic, which may impact our current conceptualizations of Gothic spaces; the literary appropriations of crowds in the Gothic that represent the female, racial, or plebian Other as "monstrous"; and the cultural intersection between Gothic readership versus political economy scholarship in the 1790s.[31]

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[31] That is, the "effulgence" (Miles 41) of Gothic publications in the last decade of the eighteenth-century and the growing interest in political and economic writings. Gothic publications made up almost 40 percent of the market share at its peak in 1795. This huge amount is especially poignant considering that almost 30 years had passed since the publication of *The Castle of Otranto* (1773) before the Gothic genre began to explode off the presses, and, by 1820, the genre would see a huge decline in market share. See Miles "The 1790s: the effulgence of Gothic" in Hogle 41-62.

For now, however, *The Monk* provides an especially interesting study of the crowd as a sublime force. Notorious for its theatricality and excess as well as its indecisive attitude toward the conventions of the romantic narrative, the novel manages to amalgamate natural and supernatural sublimities without making any effort whatsoever to distinguish them. Unlike Radcliffe, Lewis chooses not to explain away his ghosts and devils with natural causes, just as he lets the crowd, a very natural force, become colored with supernatural language and effect. In doing so, Lewis equates the sublime power of the crowd *with* his ghosts and devils. Lewis is not merely replacing the usual sublime powers (such as mountains, the sea, etc.) just with another natural force, however. Rather, the humanness of the sublime population is emphasized to exaggeration, thereby altering the sublime entirely. The crowd, in *The Monk*, is not a force against which the individual struggles to define himself, but is, instead, a force which, in a reciprocal but often self-immolating relationship, both creates and is created by or destroys and is destroyed by him. Giving the sublime a human dynamic has major implications on the formulation of the individual moving into the nineteenth century and that century's obsessive interest in "invisible-hand" economics and polity. I suggest that the role of the individual as a part of an emerging Nation-crowd was not seen as purely self-interested, but as part of a symbiotic relationship much more complex and much more powerful. In other words, a Nation, whether emerging or existing, might tremble over the power of its people, but not because the crowd stands against it, but because the Nation is itself the crowd.

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