Veritas: A Multidisciplinary Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities
ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

Monstrous Nations: Gothic Anxiety and National Identity in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*

Ankita Sarkar
Doctoral Researcher
Department of English, Raiganj University

Abstract:
This article examines how Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* construct monstrosity through anxieties surrounding institutional authority, national identity, and social exclusion. Rather than presenting evil as an isolated moral condition, both novels reveal how religious and political structures generate the very forms of instability they seek to suppress. Emerging from distinct historical moments, the texts trace a shift from late eighteenth-century fears of religious corruption and moral discipline to Victorian anxieties about imperial decline, foreign intrusion, and cultural contamination. Ambrosio and Dracula function not simply as Gothic villains, but as figures produced through systems of repression, surveillance, and ideological control that depend upon the construction of threatening others to preserve social coherence. Through a comparative reading of the two novels, this article argues that Gothic fiction exposes the contradictions embedded in institutions that claim to maintain order while simultaneously sustaining themselves through violence, exclusion, and spectacle. By situating monstrosity within the intersecting structures of religion, nationalism, and disciplinary power, the article demonstrates how Gothic narratives transform fear into a critique of the political and cultural mechanisms shaping modern identity.

Keywords: Gothic fiction; monstrosity; nationalism; surveillance; *Dracula*; *The Monk*

Introduction

Gothic fiction repeatedly emerges during moments of political instability, cultural transition, and institutional uncertainty, transforming collective anxieties into narratives structured through fear, transgression, and monstrosity. Rather than functioning solely as a literary mode associated with supernatural terror or emotional excess, the Gothic frequently interrogates the ideological mechanisms through which societies regulate behaviour, preserve authority, and construct forms of social exclusion. Monstrous figures within these narratives therefore signify more than individual corruption or irrational violence. They embody anxieties that dominant institutions struggle to contain, particularly when religious authority, national identity, and cultural legitimacy appear unstable. The Gothic imagination becomes especially significant in this context because it exposes the contradictions embedded within systems that present themselves as rational, civilised, and morally coherent while simultaneously relying upon mechanisms of control, exclusion, and ideological discipline to sustain authority.

The relationship between monstrosity and institutional power acquires particular urgency in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic fiction, where fears surrounding religious corruption, imperial instability, sexuality, and social degeneration increasingly shape literary representations of evil. Europe during this period experienced a profound ideological transformation shaped by revolutionary politics, imperial expansion, industrial modernity, and the growing influence of

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

disciplinary institutions. These historical developments intensified anxieties about preserving moral and cultural order, especially in societies seeking stability amid rapid political and social change. Gothic fiction responded to these tensions by constructing narratives in which the boundaries separating civilisation from disorder, virtue from corruption, and national identity from foreign intrusion became increasingly fragile. The monster consequently emerged not as an isolated aberration existing outside society, but as a figure through which institutional fears and cultural contradictions could be articulated and negotiated.

Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* exemplify this dynamic by situating monstrosity within broader systems of religious and national anxiety. Although separated by historical context and political concerns, both novels reveal how institutions participate in producing the forms of deviance they subsequently condemn. In *The Monk*, the monastery operates through structures of confession, repression, obedience, and moral absolutism that transform desire into guilt, secrecy, and psychological fragmentation. Ambrosio's eventual collapse exposes the contradictions underlying religious authority itself, revealing how systems organised around disciplinary control generate the instability they attempt to suppress. *Dracula*, by contrast, relocates Gothic anxiety within the context of imperial uncertainty and national insecurity, presenting the vampire as a figure through which Victorian England negotiates fears concerning foreign invasion, cultural contamination, and the erosion of English identity. Dracula's intrusion into domestic and social spaces destabilises assumptions regarding the coherence of civilisation, exposing the vulnerability concealed beneath imperial confidence and nationalist self-definition.

This article argues that *The Monk* and *Dracula* construct monstrosity as a political and institutional category rather than an inherent moral condition. Drawing upon Michel Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power and Hannah Arendt's reflections on political identity and exclusion, the study examines how systems of surveillance, repression, punishment, and ideological regulation operate within Gothic fiction to produce the monstrous figures they later attempt to eliminate. Disciplinary institutions shape behaviour and identity through continuous mechanisms of observation and control, while political communities sustain coherence through the exclusion of figures perceived as threatening to collective stability. By placing Lewis and Stoker in conversation, the article demonstrates that Gothic fiction functions as a critique of the institutional and national frameworks through which societies construct, regulate, and punish forms of otherness to preserve the illusion of moral and cultural order.

At the same time, these novels challenge the assumption that evil originates outside the structures of civilisation. Ambrosio and Dracula become monstrous precisely because they expose anxieties already embedded in the systems that attempt to contain them. Religious authority in *The Monk* depends upon repression and spectacle, reproducing violence beneath performances of virtue. At the same time, Victorian nationalism in *Dracula* increasingly relies upon surveillance, exclusion, and fears of contamination to preserve coherence. The Gothic mode consequently reveals that institutions frequently generate the conditions for instability while simultaneously presenting themselves as protections against disorder. Monstrosity emerges not as the opposite of civilisation, but as one of its most revealing products.

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

By examining the relationship between monstrosity, institutional power, and national identity across these texts, this study positions Gothic fiction as a literary mode deeply engaged with the political anxieties of its historical moment. The Gothic imagination does not merely dramatise fear; it interrogates the mechanisms through which societies preserve authority by constructing threatening others whose punishment appears necessary for social stability. *The Monk* and *Dracula* consequently reveal how nations, religious systems, and ideological institutions sustain themselves through the continual production of exclusion, transforming the monster into a figure that reflects the violence, instability, and contradictions embedded within structures of power themselves.

Gothic Monstrosity and Institutional Anxiety

The Gothic mode emerged during a period in which European societies experienced profound transformations in political authority, religious belief, scientific thought, and social organisation. The late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed the destabilising effects of revolution, industrialisation, imperial expansion, and the increasing consolidation of institutional power, developments that reshaped public understandings of morality, identity, and social order. Within this atmosphere of uncertainty, Gothic fiction became a literary form uniquely capable of expressing anxieties that could not be fully articulated through the language of Enlightenment rationality and social progress. Castles, monasteries, ruins, prisons, laboratories, and haunted domestic spaces recur throughout the genre not merely because they produce terror, but because they symbolise structures through which authority attempts to regulate behaviour, preserve ideological stability, and suppress disruption. Gothic narratives repeatedly return to these spaces to expose the fragility concealed beneath institutions that present themselves as morally and politically secure.

Monstrosity occupies a central position within this literary framework because the Gothic monster functions as a figure through which societies negotiate fears concerning instability, degeneration, and loss of control. Rather than representing evil as an isolated force existing entirely outside civilisation, Gothic fiction repeatedly suggests that monstrosity arises from contradictions embedded in social and institutional systems. The monster becomes threatening precisely because it destabilises distinctions that dominant structures attempt to preserve, including those separating virtue from corruption, civilisation from barbarism, self from other, and order from chaos. Gothic narratives consequently transform cultural anxieties into embodied forms, allowing fears surrounding sexuality, religion, political authority, and national identity to appear as visible and unsettling presences within the narrative world. In doing so, the Gothic exposes the extent to which institutions depend upon repression and exclusion to maintain the appearance of coherence.

This relationship between institutional authority and monstrosity becomes especially significant when examined through Michel Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. Foucault challenges the assumption that systems of power operate primarily through direct prohibition or visible repression. Instead, institutional authority functions productively by shaping forms of knowledge, regulating bodies, and constructing categories of normality and deviance through continuous processes of observation and discipline. Institutions such as the church, the law, medicine, and the family maintain authority not simply by

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

punishing transgression, but by producing systems through which individuals internalise surveillance and self-regulation. Power, therefore, becomes inseparable from the organisation of identity itself. Gothic fiction repeatedly dramatises these dynamics through environments structured around confession, secrecy, punishment, moral judgement, and ideological control. The more intensely institutions attempt to eliminate instability, the more clearly the narratives expose the anxieties generated through those very attempts at regulation.

The Gothic fascination with secrecy and hidden transgression reflects this disciplinary structure. Desires, fears, and forms of violence that institutions attempt to suppress do not disappear within Gothic fiction. Instead, they return in increasingly destructive forms. The hidden chamber, the forbidden manuscript, the concealed body, and the fragmented confession symbolise the failure of institutional systems to control fully what they seek to repress. Gothic narratives repeatedly suggest that repression intensifies rather than eradicates instability, producing environments in which silence and secrecy become inseparable from psychological fragmentation and social violence. This pattern becomes especially visible in narratives organised around religious discipline and moral absolutism, where attempts to preserve purity generate obsession, excess, and forms of transgression that ultimately destabilise the institution itself.

The Gothic also reveals how institutions depend upon spectacles of punishment to preserve legitimacy. Public executions, imprisonment, bodily suffering, and ritualised violence recur throughout the genre because authority frequently requires visible demonstrations of control over deviant bodies. Punishment within Gothic fiction, therefore, functions politically as well as morally. The condemned figure becomes an object through which institutions reaffirm their authority before a collective audience, transforming violence into a performative assertion of order. Yet Gothic narratives rarely present these spectacles as stable resolutions. Instead, scenes of punishment expose the brutality concealed beneath systems claiming to defend morality and civilisation. The distinction between institutional justice and institutional violence consequently becomes increasingly unstable.

Hannah Arendt's reflections in *The Human Condition* further illuminate the Gothic relationship between monstrosity and social order. Political communities sustain coherence by determining who may meaningfully appear in public life and who remains excluded from intelligible forms of social existence. Figures that resist categorisation are frequently associated with danger because they destabilise the structures through which societies define themselves. Gothic monsters repeatedly occupy such liminal positions. They cannot be fully assimilated into existing systems of understanding, and their presence therefore exposes the instability of the categories through which authority operates. Monstrous figures within Gothic fiction are often foreign, socially marginal, sexually transgressive, or psychologically fragmented because these conditions threaten systems invested in maintaining rigid distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable forms of identity.

This process becomes especially significant during periods of national and ideological uncertainty. As European nations increasingly sought to consolidate political and cultural identity during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, anxieties concerning foreignness, degeneration, and

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

contamination intensified within public discourse. Gothic fiction transformed these fears into narrative form by presenting monstrous figures who embodied threats to social and national coherence. The monster consequently became inseparable from broader political concerns surrounding belonging, exclusion, and collective identity. Fear of the monstrous other often reflected deeper anxieties about the fragility of the nation itself, particularly when institutional structures appeared incapable of fully securing cultural stability. Gothic narratives, therefore, reveal how societies construct threatening outsiders to preserve the illusion of internal coherence and moral certainty.

Both *The Monk* and *Dracula* emerge directly from these cultural tensions, although they articulate them through different institutional frameworks. Lewis situates monstrosity within the structures of religious authority, exposing how repression and moral absolutism produce violence from within the institution itself. Stoker relocates Gothic anxiety into the context of imperial instability and national insecurity, where the foreign body becomes associated with fears concerning contamination and social fragmentation. Despite these historical differences, both novels reveal how institutions generate the forms of monstrosity they subsequently condemn. The Gothic imagination becomes crucial in this context because it exposes the contradictions underlying systems that define themselves through order, purity, and moral legitimacy while simultaneously depending upon repression, exclusion, and violence to preserve authority.

Religious Authority, Repression, and the Production of Monstrosity in *The Monk*

Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* presents religious authority as a structure deeply dependent upon performance, repression, and spectacle. From the novel's opening chapters, Ambrosio is introduced not merely as a respected monk but as a public symbol of spiritual perfection whose authority depends on collective admiration and ideological idealisation. The congregation reveres him as "the Man of Holiness" (Lewis 284), a description that immediately establishes the relationship between religious power and performative identity within the novel. Ambrosio's reputation is constructed through visibility and public devotion rather than through genuine moral complexity, revealing how religious authority relies upon the maintenance of carefully regulated appearances. Lewis therefore situates the monastery within a culture organised around spectacle and discipline, where spiritual legitimacy becomes inseparable from the performance of absolute purity. The admiration surrounding Ambrosio simultaneously isolates him within an identity he cannot sustain, since the monastery allows no space for contradiction, vulnerability, or emotional complexity beneath the image of sanctity.

This idealisation exposes the fragility underlying the monastery itself. Ambrosio's authority depends on suppressing bodily desire and emotional instability because the moral system governing the monastery cannot accommodate identities that fall outside rigid categories of virtue and corruption. Purity becomes a visible condition of legitimacy, transforming desire into something that must remain hidden for the religious order to survive. Lewis repeatedly demonstrates that repression does not eliminate instability but intensifies it. Ambrosio's encounter with Matilda initiates this process of psychological fragmentation by destabilising the foundations upon which his authority depends. Her initial disguise as Rosario introduces ambiguity into a world

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

organised around fixed distinctions between masculinity and femininity, obedience and transgression, virtue and temptation. Once Matilda reveals her identity, Ambrosio's carefully regulated self-perception begins to collapse beneath impulses the monastery has taught him to deny. Lewis captures this moment of destabilisation when Ambrosio "gazed upon her with mingled surprise and admiration" (Lewis 5). The moment becomes significant because desire emerges alongside confusion and the gradual collapse of control. Ambrosio does not encounter temptation as an external force invading stable morality. Instead, suppressed desire surfaces from within the psychological conditions created through repression itself.

The relationship between repression and desire becomes increasingly destructive as the narrative progresses. Ambrosio repeatedly attempts to preserve the appearance of holiness while concealing impulses the monastery refuses to acknowledge openly. Lewis portrays this conflict not as a struggle between sacred virtue and external temptation, but as the consequence of a moral system incapable of recognising emotional and psychological complexity beyond absolutist expectations. The monastery produces conditions in which secrecy becomes necessary for survival, transforming guilt and repression into forms of psychological violence. Ambrosio's growing obsession with Antonia clearly demonstrates this process. His desires intensify precisely because they emerge within an environment governed by prohibition and silence. Religious discipline within the novel consequently becomes inseparable from the production of excess. The more intensely desire is regulated, the more violently it returns.

Lewis further develops this critique through scenes structured around confession, secrecy, and hidden transgression. The Gothic atmosphere of the monastery depends upon enclosed spaces, concealed passages, forbidden knowledge, and the constant threat of exposure. Such imagery reflects the disciplinary mechanisms operating within the religious order itself. Individuals become trapped within systems that demand continuous self-surveillance while simultaneously denying legitimate forms of emotional or bodily expression. Ambrosio's downfall, therefore, reflects more than individual moral corruption. It reveals the instability generated by systems attempting to preserve authority through repression and ideological control. His gradual transformation from revered monk to violent transgressor exposes the contradictions concealed beneath performances of spiritual certainty.

Matilda occupies a particularly destabilising role within this framework because she repeatedly disrupts the categories through which patriarchal and religious authority maintain coherence. Her intelligence, sexual autonomy, and manipulative power threaten Ambrosio not merely because they tempt him, but because they expose the artificial foundations of the identity he performs publicly. Lewis associates fear throughout the novel with figures who resist stable classification, suggesting that social authority maintains control by enforcing rigid distinctions regarding gender, morality, and acceptable behaviour. Matilda's refusal to conform fully to these expectations destabilises the ideological certainty upon which Ambrosio's authority depends. The novel, therefore, presents gender and desire as deeply connected to broader forms of social regulation and institutional anxiety.

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

The violence that concludes the novel further reveals the extent to which religious authority depends on spectacle and punishment to preserve legitimacy. Ambrosio's imprisonment, torture, and public humiliation transform his body into an object through which authority reasserts itself. Punishment functions less as moral resolution than as theatrical demonstration. The brutality inflicted upon Ambrosio mirrors the violence supposedly condemned within him, exposing how systems claiming moral superiority frequently reproduce the very cruelty they seek to eliminate. Lewis repeatedly emphasises bodily suffering during these final sections, refusing to present punishment as spiritually redemptive or morally stabilising. Instead, the conclusion reveals a structure attempting to preserve legitimacy through fear, coercion, and spectacle.

This relationship between violence and moral legitimacy ultimately positions *The Monk* as a critique of religious systems organised around repression and absolutism. Ambrosio becomes monstrous not because he exists outside civilisation, but because he embodies contradictions already embedded within the order itself. The monastery attempts to regulate desire through silence, confession, discipline, and punishment, yet these mechanisms generate the instability they seek to suppress. Lewis consequently transforms Gothic excess into a political and psychological critique of religious authority, exposing how structures that claim moral purity frequently depend on repression, exclusion, and violence to sustain themselves.

National Identity, Surveillance, and Cultural Contamination in *Dracula*

While *The Monk* locates Gothic anxiety within structures of religious authority, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* relocates these fears into the political and cultural tensions shaping late-nineteenth-century England. The novel emerges from a historical moment marked by anxieties surrounding imperial decline, reverse colonisation, degeneration, and the instability of national identity at the end of the century. England, despite presenting itself as the centre of imperial civilisation and rational modernity, increasingly feared that foreign forces might penetrate and destabilise the nation's coherence from within. Stoker transforms these anxieties into Gothic form through Dracula, whose presence threatens not merely individual victims but the ideological structures through which English society defines itself. The vampire becomes dangerous because he destabilises boundaries separating civilisation from barbarism, domestic order from foreign intrusion, and national purity from contamination.

Jonathan Harker's journey into Transylvania establishes this atmosphere of uncertainty from the novel's opening pages. Before Dracula himself appears, the narrative repeatedly emphasises unfamiliar movement, disrupted geography, linguistic disorientation, and cultural estrangement. Harker's observations initially appear casual and descriptive, yet they quietly reveal an English perspective organised through assumptions of Western superiority and imperial order. Early in his journey, Harker remarks that "the further East you go, the more unpunctual are the trains" (Stoker 12). Although seemingly insignificant, the statement establishes an immediate contrast between England and Eastern Europe through the language of efficiency, order, and civilisation. Foreign space becomes associated with irregularity and instability, reflecting broader cultural anxieties concerning regions imagined as politically uncertain or culturally inferior. As Harker moves further away from England, familiar systems of interpretation begin to collapse. Customs,

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

landscapes, food, language, and social behaviour increasingly resist rational classification, producing a growing sense of vulnerability beneath his confidence as an English traveller.

This instability intensifies once Harker arrives at Dracula's castle, where movement gives way to confinement and surveillance. His gradual recognition that "the castle is a veritable prison" (Stoker 35) transforms the Gothic setting into a symbolic space where distinctions between host and captor, civilisation and barbarism, safety and danger become increasingly unstable. Dracula's castle functions not merely as an isolated supernatural environment but also as a site that exposes the fragility of assumptions about rational control and imperial superiority. Harker's imprisonment reveals the vulnerability concealed beneath English confidence because the structures through which he understands geography, identity, and authority no longer provide coherence or security. Dracula himself becomes terrifying not only because of his supernatural power, but also because he crosses boundaries separating foreignness from domestic space and disrupts the ideological stability upon which national identity depends.

The novel intensifies these anxieties further once Dracula enters England. Society responds to perceived threats through systems of documentation, surveillance, and collective observation that structure the narrative itself. Diaries, telegrams, phonograph recordings, memoranda, medical reports, and newspaper accounts organise the text into a network of constantly circulating information. This obsession with recording and classification reflects a culture attempting to preserve order through the management of knowledge. Beneath this rational structure, however, lies profound insecurity regarding the stability of both the nation and the body. Dracula repeatedly escapes systems designed to identify, contain, and eliminate him because he resists fixed categorisation. He appears simultaneously aristocratic and primitive, foreign and intimate. He embodies both sophistication and savagery, making him impossible to classify within the rigid frameworks Victorian culture depends upon. His ability to cross borders and enter domestic spaces transforms him into a figure through whom fears of contamination and national vulnerability are negotiated.

Blood becomes one of the novel's most powerful symbols within this context because it represents not merely biological survival but cultural continuity, inheritance, purity, and social identity. Dracula's attacks repeatedly involve forms of bodily exchange that destabilise distinctions between self and other, native and foreign, purity and corruption. Lucy Westenra's transformation illustrates these anxieties with particular intensity. Before her contamination, Lucy embodies the idealised image of feminine innocence and social desirability. Following Dracula's influence, however, she becomes associated with excessive desire, seduction, and predatory sexuality. Stoker's description of Lucy as possessing "a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive" while she "licked her lips like an animal" (Stoker 46) reveals the extent to which the novel associates female sexuality outside patriarchal control with monstrosity and social disorder.

The violent destruction of Lucy's vampiric body consequently functions as an attempt to restore ideological stability by eliminating forms of femininity that threaten established structures of gender and morality.

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

Mina Harker occupies a more unstable and complex position within the novel because she simultaneously supports and challenges dominant gender expectations. Her intelligence, organisational ability, and active participation in the group's investigation repeatedly position her within spaces traditionally associated with masculine authority and rational labour. Mina directly contributes to the collection and interpretation of information on which the pursuit of Dracula depends. At the same time, her growing psychic connection with Dracula destabilises her social position by placing her between categories of purity and contamination, selfhood and invasion. The scene in which Dracula forces Mina to drink his blood represents one of the most disturbing moments in the novel because it transforms bodily violation into symbolic contamination of identity itself. Mina's fear that she has become "unclean" (Stoker 276) reflects broader anxieties concerning degeneration and the erosion of stable social boundaries. Her condition threatens not only individual corruption but the possibility that the structures preserving national and cultural coherence may themselves be vulnerable.

The collective pursuit of Dracula in the latter sections of the novel further demonstrates how society responds to instability through intensified surveillance, coordination, and disciplinary violence. The group organising against Dracula relies on systems of information gathering, mapping, tracking, and strategic observation to contain perceived disorder. Violence becomes legitimised as a necessary defence of civilisation and national integrity. Yet the intensity of this response simultaneously reveals the insecurity operating beneath imperial confidence. Dracula exposes fears already circulating within late nineteenth-century culture, particularly anxieties about foreign intrusion, racial degeneration, and the fragility of English identity in an increasingly unstable imperial world. The vampire, therefore, becomes more than a supernatural enemy. He embodies the contradictions and insecurities embedded in the ideological structures that attempt to exclude him.

Although the destruction of Dracula appears to restore order at the novel's conclusion, Stoker leaves many of these anxieties unresolved. The narrative repeatedly suggests that the fears represented through Dracula originate within English society itself rather than existing entirely outside it. Concerns regarding contamination, degeneration, sexuality, and imperial instability continue to shape the world the characters inhabit, even after the vampire's death. Gothic horror consequently becomes a means through which the novel interrogates the political and cultural structures sustaining national identity at the end of the nineteenth century. Dracula remains threatening not simply because he is monstrous, but because he reveals how fragile the boundaries protecting civilisation and social coherence truly are.

Monstrous Nations and the Politics of Exclusion

Although *The Monk* and *Dracula* emerge from different historical and political moments, both novels reveal how systems of power preserve legitimacy by constructing and excluding threatening figures imagined as dangerous to collective stability. Lewis situates this anxiety within structures of religious discipline and moral absolutism, while Stoker relocates it into fears surrounding imperial decline, national vulnerability, and cultural contamination. The movement between the two novels reflects a broader transformation within Gothic fiction itself. Late eighteenth-century

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

Gothic narratives frequently exposed the violence concealed beneath religious authority. In contrast, late nineteenth-century Gothic increasingly redirected these anxieties toward unstable national identity, foreign intrusion, and imperial insecurity. Despite these historical differences, both novels construct monstrosity not as an external force outside society, but as something produced by the contradictions embedded in the systems that attempt to suppress it. The Gothic imagination becomes especially powerful in this context because it exposes how structures of authority generate the instability they later attempt to destroy.

In *The Monk*, religious authority depends upon rigid distinctions between sanctity and corruption, obedience and transgression, purity and desire. Ambrosio initially appears to be the ideal embodiment of spiritual virtue because the monastery requires visible displays of holiness to sustain legitimacy before the public. Yet the institution's dependence upon absolutism produces its own instability. Desire becomes threatening precisely because it cannot be acknowledged openly within the moral structure governing the monastery. Ambrosio's gradual descent into secrecy, violence, and psychological fragmentation consequently reveals the fragility of the ideological order that shaped him. Lewis repeatedly demonstrates that repression intensifies what it seeks to eliminate. The monastery attempts to preserve spiritual coherence through discipline, confession, and punishment, yet these mechanisms generate concealed violence and emotional instability beneath the appearance of moral certainty. The tragedy surrounding Ambrosio lies not merely in individual moral failure, but in the destructive consequences of a structure incapable of accommodating human complexity outside rigid moral control.

Stoker develops a comparable anxiety through the language of nationalism and imperial insecurity. England attempts to define itself through assumptions of rationality, scientific progress, civilisation, and cultural superiority, yet *Dracula* repeatedly exposes the fragility underlying these ideals. Dracula becomes threatening because he crosses the boundaries that English identity seeks to preserve itself. His foreignness positions him as an invasive figure associated with contamination, degeneration, and social disorder. Still, the intensity of the fear directed toward him reveals insecurities already present within English society itself. Anxiety surrounding Dracula reflects broader late nineteenth-century concerns regarding imperial decline, unstable borders, and fears of reverse colonisation. The threat he represents extends beyond physical violence because he destabilises distinctions between self and other, civilisation and barbarism, and purity and corruption. Foreign space throughout the novel repeatedly becomes associated with irregularity, uncertainty, and instability, exposing how national identity often depends upon constructing imagined outsiders against which civilisation defines itself.

Both novels also reveal how violence becomes legitimised through the language of protection and moral necessity. Punishment plays a central role in preserving social order because threatening figures must be publicly contained or eliminated for collective stability to appear secure. In *The Monk*, Ambrosio's torture and execution transform violence into spectacle, exposing the brutality concealed beneath religious morality. *Dracula* presents a similar dynamic through the organised pursuit of the vampire, in which surveillance, coordination, and collective violence are justified as necessary for the defence of civilisation and national integrity. The men pursuing Dracula

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

repeatedly frame their actions as moral duty, yet the novel simultaneously reveals how fear produces increasingly aggressive forms of exclusion and control. Gothic fiction consequently exposes the extent to which systems claiming moral authority frequently depend on coercion and violence to sustain legitimacy.

The body becomes a central site through which institutions attempt to regulate morality, purity, and collective identity. In both novels, physical and psychological instability reflect broader anxieties concerning the collapse of institutional and social order. Bodily transformation repeatedly becomes associated with fears surrounding contamination, loss of control, and the erosion of socially regulated identity. The monster consequently threatens not merely individual victims, but the systems through which morality, legitimacy, and belonging are constructed and maintained. Gothic fiction, therefore, presents the body not simply as a biological entity, but as a symbolic space upon which political, religious, and ideological anxieties become visibly inscribed.

These anxieties become especially visible through the relationship between exclusion and collective identity. Societies preserve coherence by identifying figures imagined as dangerous to moral, political, or national stability. Gothic monsters, therefore, operate as symbolic outsiders whose exclusion appears necessary for the continuation of social order. Yet Lewis and Stoker repeatedly reveal the instability of this process, as the monster reflects fears already embedded in the structures attempting to eliminate it. Ambrosio embodies contradictions generated through religious absolutism, while Dracula exposes insecurities embedded within imperial modernity and nationalist ideology. The boundaries separating civilisation from monstrosity consequently remain unstable throughout both novels, revealing how systems organised around purity and control inevitably generate forms of repression and violence beneath the appearance of order.

By placing *The Monk* and *Dracula* in conversation, Gothic fiction emerges as a powerful critique of the mechanisms by which societies construct threats to others to preserve legitimacy. Monstrosity does not originate outside civilisation but develops through the contradictions, anxieties, and forms of exclusion embedded in structures that claim to defend moral and cultural stability. The monster ultimately becomes terrifying not simply because it threatens society, but because it reveals how instability, repression, and violence already exist within the foundations of the institutions attempting to contain it.

Conclusion

Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* demonstrate that Gothic fiction operates not merely through supernatural terror, but through sustained engagement with the political, religious, and cultural anxieties shaping modern society. Although the novels emerge from distinct historical moments, both construct monstrosity through systems attempting to preserve moral and social coherence during periods marked by instability and ideological uncertainty. Lewis exposes the violence concealed beneath religious absolutism and disciplinary repression, while Stoker transforms fears surrounding imperial decline, foreign contamination, and unstable national identity into Gothic form. In both texts, monstrous figures become inseparable from the structures seeking to regulate and eliminate them. Ambrosio and Dracula, therefore, function not simply as

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

embodiments of evil but as figures revealing contradictions already embedded within the institutions that claim authority over morality, identity, and collective order.

The Gothic imagination becomes especially significant in this context because it exposes the fragility concealed beneath systems organised around surveillance, exclusion, and control. Religious discipline in *The Monk* produces secrecy, repression, and psychological fragmentation beneath performances of spiritual purity. At the same time, *Dracula* presents a society increasingly dependent on documentation, coordination, and collective violence to preserve the illusion of national stability. The fears generated within these narratives emerge not only from external chaos, but also from the recognition that structures claiming to protect civilisation frequently contribute to the instability they seek to suppress. Gothic fiction consequently transforms fear into a form of political and cultural critique, revealing how authority often depends on exclusionary forms of power to sustain legitimacy.

Both novels also demonstrate that monstrosity becomes most threatening when it destabilises the boundaries through which societies define themselves. Ambrosio collapses the distinction between sanctity and corruption, while Dracula disrupts the ideological separation between civilisation and foreignness upon which English identity depends. Figures associated with contamination, bodily transformation, and social transgression repeatedly expose the instability of categories organised around morality, purity, and belonging. The violence directed toward these figures, therefore, reflects more than individual punishment. It represents collective attempts to restore ideological order by eliminating what cannot be fully controlled or assimilated.

At the same time, neither novel allows this restoration of order to appear complete or secure. The destruction of Ambrosio and Dracula does not erase the anxieties their existence reveals because those anxieties originate within the structures of authority themselves. Religious systems in *The Monk* remain dependent upon repression and spectacle, just as the society represented in *Dracula* continues to reveal fears concerning degeneration, surveillance, and imperial instability. Gothic fiction consequently resists simple resolution. Instead, it reveals how modern structures of power repeatedly construct threats to others to preserve the illusion of coherence while concealing the violence and contradictions operating within their own foundations.

By placing *The Monk* and *Dracula* in conversation, this study demonstrates how Gothic narratives transform monstrosity into a means of interrogating the political, religious, and cultural mechanisms shaping modern identity. The monster ultimately becomes terrifying not because it exists outside civilisation, but because it reveals the instability, repression, and violence already embedded within the systems attempting to contain it.

References

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. 2nd ed., University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Vintage Books, 1990.

Hogle, Jerrold E., editor. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk: A Romance*. Classy Publishing, 2021.

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

Luckhurst, Roger. “Dracula and Psychology.” *The Cambridge Companion to Dracula*, edited by Roger Luckhurst, Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 66–75.
Punter, David. “Scottish and Irish Gothic.” *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*. Vol. 2, Longman, 1996, pp. 105–124.
Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*. Methuen, 1986.
Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. Fingerprint Classics, 2021.
Wilt, Judith. *Ghosts of the Gothic: Austen, Eliot, and Lawrence*. Princeton University Press, 1980.
Wolfreys, Julian, editor. *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*. Edinburgh University Press, 2013.