From innocence to experience. The seduction of knowledge in *Melmoth the Wanderer*

by *Paolo Pepe**

Abstract

This essay discusses one of the masterpieces of English Gothic literature: *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) by Charles Robert Maturin. The analysis focuses on the complex relationship established by the eponymous protagonist, Melmoth, with the young and innocent Immalee, within the interpolated *Tale of the Indians*. The corruption of innocence, the Wanderer's attempt to attract and seduce, unfolds on the fringes of the erotic sphere and its rhetoric, thus becoming a marker of both epistemic and aesthetic tension.
Most unexpectedly, the diabolical seducer's act brings about no impulse towards assimilation. On the contrary, it arouses in the designated victim an irrepressible desire for differentiation and distinction between the self and the other, fostering a drive to separate and to learn, yielding to the entropy of becoming to experience the energy of difference and the giddying vertigo of the extreme form of Gothic trespass: the (Blakeian) marriage of Heaven and Hell.

Keywords: Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, Immalee, Knowledge, Seduction, Suffering, *Paradise Lost*.

1
The road to perdition

From Aphra Behn to Delarivier Manley and Eliza Haywood, to name just the most important, the numerous tales of amorous intrigue that appear on the English literary market between the end of the 17th and the first thirty years of the 18th century, dramatize, through plots revolving around courtship and seduction, under the ambiguous guise of persecuted innocence, an antagonism between classes and genders that was increasingly felt and variously discussed at the turn of the new century (see: Richetti, 1992, pp. 124-5).

It is certainly true that the prevailing, socially-oriented, paradigm reflects a kind of obsession with the loss of virginity, especially female virginity (see: Bowers, 1999, p. 129; Harol, 2006, pp. 2-5), presenting young unworldly women misled by the flattery of licentious aristocrats and for this reason condemned to perdition and a fate of death or marginalization. At the same time, however, it is also true that this trajectory of error and fall takes a variety of forms in the dozens of volumes of amatory fiction published in those years (Haywood alone published as many as 36 novels in the two decades following the success of *Love in Excess*, of 1719).

* Università eCampus.

Testi e linguaggi, 16/2022, pp. 197-207
ISSN 1974-2886
© Carocci Editore S.p.A.

Specifically, its inevitability appears to be problematized by a series of questions surrounding male *and* female agency and thus the true potential for individual choice in the sphere of sexual behaviour[1]. This fluidity in effect suggests a way of understanding the nature of desire – and its dynamics – that represents an alternative to the moral discourse promulgated by the contemporary precepts aimed at sentimental education[2].

From this point of view, 1740 marks a turning point: Richardson publishes *Pamela*, the epistolary novel that codifies a model of the relationship between the sexes (and between the literary character and the public) destined for great success throughout Europe.

Spiritual and possessed of an unshakable religious faith, the very young protagonist, Pamela, rejects the role of victim and reframes the contents of her own personal story in the exemplary and transparent terms of a testament to *virtus*, of a purity that is threatened *but* defended[3]. She is ultimately rewarded by a reversal of the power relations with the rake, Mr. B., in his turn seduced and redeemed, by a rewriting of class and gender relations shaped by a rhetoric not of *eros* but of *ethos*[4].

Richardson's subsequent novel, *Clarissa*, offers a complementary and necessary interpretation of that model. Here the heroine, blemished by sin – irreparable though involuntary –, *chooses* to die, aestheticizing a practice whose popularity was well-established: the Christian preparation for a good death (*Ars Moriendi*), the subject of numerous writings and treatises from the 15th century onwards[5].

The second half of the 18th century sees a reformulation of the parameters. Specifically, if we look at the Gothic novel, the focus of this paper, the seduction paradigm becomes increasingly polarized and rigid. The semantic area of *seduction* shifts seamlessly towards that of *rape*, of "forced sexual intercourse"; words congeal and gradually cede their communicative capacity to the body, able to express emotions and feelings more and better than words, as amply attested by the sentimental novels, but above all able to kindle an erotic desire that now demands satisfaction, no matter whether this entails the (at least attempted) exercise of violence: seductive argumentation is replaced by a proxemic of subjugation.

Moreover, in the novels that deviate from Radcliffe's "Enlightenment" Gothic and belong to the line that runs from Lewis to Stoker – a hundred years separate *The Monk* (1796) from *Dracula* (1897) – this shift takes extreme expression in forms of wicked enjoyment, of a fatal attraction to flesh and blood (see: Pepe, 2015, pp. 119-20). And that is not all: also manifest is the other plot underlying every seductive ambush intended to induce a transgression and turn the victim from the righteous path: the perversion operated by diabolical intervention, according to which there is no seduction that cannot be ascribed to absolute Evil, to Satan or one of his messengers (see: Folena, 2012b, pp. 7-8). The *corruptio* of Ambrosio, the monk, is well known; equally and perhaps even more emblematic is that of Melmoth the Wanderer, the eponymous protagonist of the novel published in 1820 by the Protestant pastor Charles Robert Maturin.

In *Melmoth the Wanderer*, we find a specific interpretation of the diabolical seduction motif in the interpolated *Tale of the Indians*. Here, in the complex relationship established by the Wanderer with the naive and ethereal Immalee, the

process of fascination, of attraction to evil, reveals its biblical and Miltonian origins as it unfolds on the margins of the erotic and its rhetoric to construe itself instead as a path of learning, as the conquest of knowledge. Emblematically, the seducer's act does not generate a drive towards assimilation; on the contrary, it instils in the intended victim an overwhelming desire for differentiation, to seek out the distinction between the self and that which is other than the self, awakening in her a yearning to separate and to know, to cross the polished threshold of beauty and the identical to experience the energy of the dissimilar, up to the dizzying heights of the trespass *par excellence* of the Gothic aesthetic: the (Blakeian) marriage of heaven and hell.

2
Mixing memory and desire

Maturin's novel begins with an old mistake: the pact with the devil aimed at appeasing the *libido sciendi*, the desire to know, to penetrate the unknown and even the forbidden. Driven, like Faust, by pride and intellectual presumption, John Melmoth, an Irish lord born in the 16th century, renounces his own soul and damns himself in exchange for a world of knowledge sought through a life prolonged "beyond the period allotted to mortality", by another hundred and fifty years, or perhaps more, "should the fearful terms of his existence be renewed" (Maturin, 2008, pp. 535; 538)[6].

Diverging from the Faustian precedent, in Maturin's novel the pact also takes on the characteristics of a challenge. To please his master, Melmoth corrupts, kills and torments; yet he simultaneously tries to free himself and regain hope of eternal salvation by transferring the infernal bond to some other unhappy person, plunged by circumstances into the abyss of despair.

In a plot arranged on four levels, in turn traversed by small secondary rivulets, the episodic appearance of the Wanderer is the only, tenuous thread of continuity in a narrative that speaks little of him and much of other things. The narrative proceeds without a true focus and without a hierarchy; that is, it does not take shape around a principal or common core, but rather through the insistent juxtaposition or interpolation of multiple stories. These stories are complete in themselves, though they are entrusted to often fragmentary documents that inevitably create logical and temporal gaps in the narrative *continuum*.

Melmoth the Wanderer opens with the young John Melmoth leaving Trinity College Dublin in the fall of 1816 and travelling to County Wicklow to attend to a dying uncle, who years earlier had retired to his family estate, 'The Lodge', now almost in ruins. During a dramatic final interview, John is informed of the existence of a secret concerning an ancestor, his namesake, who has been alive for about two centuries. On one of the walls of the study is the painting that portrays him, "inscribed J. Melmoth, 1646" (p. 21); in a footnote at the bottom of his will the uncle orders his nephew to destroy this painting, ideally together with the manuscript hidden "in the third and lowest left-hand drawer of the mahogany chest standing under the portrait" (p. 21).

The first level of the narrative, in the third person, consists of the quest of the young John Melmoth to penetrate the aura of mystery surrounding the man in the painting, who will eventually reveal himself to his younger relative in his birthplace as it is here that he wishes his earthly existence to end. The two stories that underpin the novel unfold within this sort of frame. Recounted on the "very mouldly and discoloured" papers found by John (p. 21), the first reconstructs, again in the third person, the controversial events that happened to an Englishman named Stanton, during the years of the Restoration: having escaped the seductions of Melmoth, he devotes the rest of his life to tracking him around Europe, hoping to meet him once again. The second (*Tale of the Spaniard*) focuses on the adventures of the Spaniard Alonzo Monçada, the sole survivor of the ship on which he was travelling, surprised by a storm off the Irish coast; John rescues Monçada, who then tells him his story. Then there is the narrative level that we could describe as the *tale within the tale*: specifically, the sad story of Donna Ines de Cardoza, contained "in the Stanton document"; and the *Tale of the Indians*. Finally, there are the stories included in the *Tale of the Indians*, namely *The Tale of Guzman's Family*, told to Don Francisco di Aliaga by a foreigner who later pays for his recklessness with his life, and *The Lover's Tale*, concerning the unhappy love affair between Elinor Mortimer and John Sandal, of which Don Francisco is again informed by Melmoth the Wanderer (see: Null, 1977, pp. 133-47; O'Sullivan, 2016, pp. 74-84; Stott, 1987, pp. 41-52).

On a chronological level, the novel essentially unfolds within a dual timeframe: the second half of the 17th century, and the years between the late 18th and early 19th centuries, but not in a linear and coherent way. Character and reader are thus united by an identical destiny: whilst the young Melmoth must identify and fit together the disassembled and dispersed pieces of his ancestor's story, the reader must rearrange the pieces of a narrative that continually confuses through deferral, digressions, and changing settings. To remain with this latter aspect, *Melmoth* has a wide-ranging geographical setting, scattered between Ireland, Spain, Germany, England and India: in practice an almost complete map of the Gothic novel, enriched by incursions into London and its environs, and by its openness to an Edenic and literary East. With rare exceptions, however, these places are not described. The story wanders, covering immense distances in a few lines, only to seek refuge, as soon as possible, within specific and often narrow boundaries: a castle, a convent, a country house, the rooms or the *hortus conclusus* of a noble palace, the damp and mouldy walls of cellars, dungeons, crypts, up to the suffocating alienation of the cell of an asylum (see: Ferrari, 1999, pp. 327-50).

The impression of fragmentation conveyed by the work[7] is further heightened by the peculiar structuring of the text, containing a true encyclopaedia of words and books, triggering a complex intertextual play amplified by the recurring interventions of the author as editor[8].

The *Tale of the Indians* occupies a quantitatively and qualitatively important place in this palimpsest of reminiscences, languages, contexts. At its centre is the character of Immalee, the solitary queen of a pristine island in the Indian Ocean on whose shores she was abandoned when still a child after a shipwreck. When already an adult, she is

rediscovered by a singular fate and taken to Madrid, the Madrid of the late 17th century, where she begins a new life with her family of origin, the Aliaga, under the name of Isidora.

The attempt at seduction made by the Wanderer on several occasions in the *locus amoenus* of the island is narrated in chapters XIV to XVIII of the third volume of the novel; it then continues in Spain, occupying much of the fourth book. The underlying model is the temptation of Eve by the Serpent, in the version composed by Milton in *Paradise Lost*; this paradigm is constantly recalled by direct quotations, echoes and allusions, but it is also reversed in a story that distances the loss and the fall, to tell, on the contrary, not of a downfall but of a choice, of a self-aware rite of passage from innocence (including sexual innocence) to primarily intellectual experience.

Though Immalee becomes instantly agitated when the seducer reveals himself, it is neither the stranger's gaze nor his persuasive force of speech that provokes this sudden attraction in her. She is captivated, her soul unsettled by the mere sound of the words spoken by Melmoth: it is their cadence and musical quality, regardless of any meaning and opportunity for understanding, that awakens a dormant memory that instils desire in her:

> The stranger advanced, and, […] addressed her in the language which she herself had retained some words of since infancy, and had endeavoured in vain to make her peacocks, parrots, and loxias. […] But her language, from want of practice, had become so limited, that she was delighted to hear its most unmeaning sounds uttered by human lips […] (p. 282).

To paraphrase Kierkegaard's considerations on novels (2017, p. 80), we could say that hearing Melmoth and loving him was one and the same for Immalee; it is thus evident that in this case desire, manifestly, is not generated by the person himself but by what, belonging to him, makes him desirable (see: Bottiroli, 2020, p. 141). It is Immalee, once in the land of Spain, who confirms to Melmoth the mechanism that has kindled in her that inescapable love:

> I loved you not for comeliness, – I loved you not for gay deportment, or fond language, or all that is said to be lovely in the eye of woman, […] I loved you because you were my *first* –, the sole connecting link between the human world and my heart, […] because your voice when I heard it first, was something in accordance with the murmur of the ocean and the music of the stars. And still its tones recall the unimaginable blessedness of those scenes where first I heard it […] (p. 375).

Memory and nostalgia. It is no wonder, then, that if we return to the initial stages of their meeting it almost takes the form of an agnition, thanks in part to the echoes of the words spoken in Shakespeare's *Pericles*, in one of the most extraordinary "revelation" scenes of any literary work, English or otherwise. If we read the questions that Immalee poses to Melmoth alongside those addressed by Pericles to Marina the allusions are evident:

But where do you come from? [...] Where did you grow and how came you here? (*Melmoth the Wanderer*, p. 283)	What country woman? [...] Where were you bred? [...] How came you in these parts? (*Pericles*, V.i.102; 163; 169)

Indeed, the arrival of the Wanderer allows Immalee to recover and shed light on something that is already within herself, in her own "internal foreign territory"[9]; this explains the downgrading of the rhetoric of love as a seduction technique made explicit by the text: it is simply denoted as superfluous and dissonant because the game is being played on a different level.

Melmoth's initial attempts keep to a seductive strategy based on flattery: "God never made a fairer creature, replied the stranger, grasping her hand, and fixing on her eyes that still burn in the sockets of that arch-deceiver" (p. 282).

Immalee responds by suddenly shifting the focus of the discourse to what truly interests her, that is to say, repeating a story already told, to know, to draw with questions and requests on the infinite knowledge of *her* Satan. This profound desire, brought out by Melmoth, is linked in Immalee to curiosity about the different and her intention to escape the closed and static homogeneity of the island to enter the changeability and entropy of becoming.

The seduction process unfolds in the creases and impulses of the desiring will that originate from this tension. Beyond any rhetoric of eros, the seduction thus outlines a path of acculturation, of gradual awareness of oneself as a *subject expanding towards the multiple*: "I have thought I loved the things around me too much, and that I should love things *beyond me* [...]" (p. 290).

A symbol of innocence like Blake's Thel (1789), unlike Thel Immalee does not flee in terror (*with a shriek*; IV.21) from the experience of a world "of suffering, guilt and care" (p. 285), inhabited by beings whose sole thought "is how to increase their own sufferings, and those of others, to the outmost possible degree" (p. 300). Deliberately, she decides to make it her own, though she knows that she is opening herself up to pain and to the possibility of a darkness that will soon weigh on her soul too:

> She had, indeed, tasted of the tree of knowledge, and her eyes were opened, but its fruit was bitter to her taste, and her looks conveyed a kind of mild and melancholy gratitude... and her down cast and thoughtful eyes were full of tears.
> Has my conversation wearied you, Immalee? Said he. It has grieved me (pp. 308-9).

However, although she allows herself to be bewitched by the polyphony of voices that "talk thoughts" (p. 287), Immalee retains a sense of her own distinction, to the point of imagining herself capable of taking on all that affliction and relieving it, almost like a figure of Mary or Christ: "Oh that I could live in that world, for I would make every one happy!" (p. 285).

This mirroring is reaffirmed and confirmed by the text: even after entering the temporal sphere of history, she retains within her the stigmata of an excellence that elevates her. In some ways, Immalee's perfection constitutes the antithetical but complementary face of the contemporary Gothic monstrous. Both conditions – one inspiring deferential respect, the other bewilderment and repulsion; we might think of Frankenstein's Creature, or, obviously, Melmoth himself – signal, beyond any metaphorical reading, the impossibility of assimilation.

Exemplary, and once again full of echoes, is the description of the effects produced by Immalee/Isidora as she walks along a Madrid street:

> Men of the loosest gallantry fell back as she approached, with involuntary awe- the libertine who looked on her was half-converted – the susceptible beheld her as one who realized that vision of imagination that must never be embodied here [... she] seemed like a comet in the world of beauty, bound by no laws, or by laws that she alone understood and obeyed [...] (p. 328).

A perfection that is ostensibly untouchable but that, as in the case of Faust or Ambrosio, conceals a flaw, a weak point, a potential foothold for tempting her soul.

3
The Marriage of Heaven and Hell

On the island, the weakness that makes Immalee vulnerable, that which prevents her from closing "the Ear [...] to its own destruction" (IV.11) lies, as we have seen, in her propensity to desire something and someone else; a propensity fueled by an error of interpretation that disposes her to futile languishing.

The error is that made by Narcissus, according to most versions of the Ovidian myth recounted between the Middle Ages and the 18th century, in which the salient feature of the tragedy is not that it results from self-love, from falling in love with oneself, but the fact that it takes the form of love of an image, of falling in love with a shadow[10]:

> "And you live here alone," he said, "and you have lived in this beautiful place without a companion?" – "Oh no!" said Immalee, "I have a companion more beautiful than all the flowers in the isle. [...] My friend lives under the water, but its colours are so bright. It kisses me too, but its lips are very cold; and when I kiss it, it seems to dance, and its beauty is all broken into a thousand faces, that come smiling at me like little stars. [...]"
> "Is your friend male or female," said the stranger. – "what is that?" answered Immalee. – "I mean, of what sex is your friend?" But to this question he could obtain no satisfactory answer [...] (pp. 284-5).

This is the same error that Eve is on the point of making in *Paradise Lost*, fascinated by her own reflection in the waters of the lake (IV.460-468) but saved from losing herself in *vain desire* (IV.466) by a divine or angelic voice that leads her "to the place where Adam is", his image, of course, but endowed with a body and with it "a full

and physically independent existence" (Folena, 2012a, p. 123). It is the idolatrous error of mistaking "mirrored semblances" (Alighieri, *Paradise*, III.20) for real creatures, for what they allude to; to worship – paraphrasing George Herbert (*The Pulley*, LL.13-14) – the gifts instead of the giver, Nature instead of the God of Nature (not coincidentally, before she listens to the Wanderer, Immalee is unaware of the existence of God, as well as of the sexualized body). She persists in this error after the appearance of Melmoth, whose sensible form is fixed, pneumatically, we might go so far as to say, recalling the classical and medieval theories known to Maturin (a reader and scholar of Dante)[11], is fixed, we were saying, in the imagination, generating a simulacrum of love continuously visited by fantasy and memory in a circle that becomes vicious and morbid[12]. Through its relation to Melmoth, whose essence lies in atopy, indecipherable since by definition there is no identifiable space in which to position and circumscribe him, as he is the Wanderer, desire inevitably becomes the perception and iteration of a lack that induces contemplative and melancholy yearning for the *image*, for the *phàntasma*.

> Your image is for ever before me, present or absent, sleeping or waking. [...] The first, the indelible image, is written on mine, and its characters will never be effaced till that heart is a clod of the valley (pp. 374-5).

It is this interior disposition, torn between the impulse to know, to step outside oneself, and losing oneself in the mental labyrinths of longing, that encourages yielding to sin, a sin sealed, three years later in Spain, by an infernal marriage with a damned being and the conception of a child who is the daughter of an emissary of the devil, a blasphemous counterpoint to the Nativity par excellence (that of Jesus).

Yet Immalee/Isidora manages to stop short a step away from perdition, renouncing Melmoth to die in faith, after seeing the fruit of that heretical love die and rot.

If the denouement takes place only in Madrid and not before, however, it is because a story that is almost a mirror image of this one is written on the island. A story that sees the Wanderer withdrawing, abandoning that paradise without completing his planned seduction, that is, without defiling the young woman and thus assimilating his victim to himself and to his own fate. A decision triggered by an unexpected and excruciating feeling of guilt in which we can read the persistence in Melmoth of an awareness of the distance that exists between a completed act and the moral law inscribed by God in every soul.

Melmoth vanishes, leaving Immalee's lifeless body on the beach, locking the beginning and end of this first fragment of their amorous discourse into a terrible symmetry. Here, too, there are echoes of well-known literary antecedents: the tragedy of Dido, for example, but even more so of the myth of Ariadne, "forgotten" by Theseus on a remote island "beaten by thunderous waves, an abstract place where only seaweed moves" (Calasso, 1988, p. 30).

In reality, in Immalee's case, the expression 'seduced and abandoned' takes on some specific and significant nuances of meaning with respect to its possible models.

Immalee is certainly "captured" by Melmoth in his seducer's snares, but on the island at least she is not "won". She is certainly seduced, but in the sense given to the Greek verb *phtheírein*, as Calasso (1988, p. 13) points out with respect to the myth of Ariadne: that is, broken into pieces, having chosen to indulge the desire that emerged on the appearance of the Wanderer and determined to renounce her own undivided fullness in favour of the transience of the mutable.

By contrast, Melmoth's abandonment does not in this case signal the seducer's indifference after having satisfied his desires; rather, it takes on the features and significance of a truce, albeit a temporary one, leaving the victim a possibility of salvation.

Such mythical allusions are in some cases barely a hint: as Calasso (1988, p. 36) notes, "the figures of myth have many lives and many deaths, unlike the characters of novels, bound each time to a single act". Melmoth's acts are serial and repeated: he seduces, and thus also destroys, errs and sets aside. As for Immalee, her journey, within the perimeter drawn by her desire, is summed up with cultured concision by Mario Praz (1976, p. 94): she begins life with a character similar to that of Byron's Haidée in *Don Juan*, and ends it with a destiny that connects her to Goethe's Margarete.

Notes

1. As Warner stresses (2012, p. 93): "In the novels of amorous intrigue [..] their inventive complications of the ordinary courtship plot, through the use of masquerade, incite a desire which is polymorphous, and exploits the pleasures of cross-gender identification. Precisely because they blur the identity of subject positions, these fictions can hail a general reader". According to Potter (2003: 174), too, from the Restoration onwards: "the libertine fascination with disguise (manifested in masks, masquerades, and appropriated identities) [...], in addition to providing entertainment, allowed both men and women to pursue their passions without accountability".

2. Behn, Manley and Haywood's novels "represent sexualised bodies and amoral egos plotting to secure their own pleasures at the expense of others [...] they teach readers, men and women, to articulate their desires and put the self first, through reading novels where characters do so" (Warner, 2012, p. 94).

3. See: Pavel (2002, pp. 47-9); Richetti (1992, p. 169). It is also interesting to note, with Harol (2006, p. 196n10), that "even when clearly Pamela's physical virginity is at stake, "virginity" is rarely used. For instance, in the first edition [...] "virtue" appears over 130 times, while "virginity" makes only about a dozen appearances". This prompts a reflection on Pamela's euphemistic speech and its constant omission of any reference to the body and the corporeal.

4. Without going into a complex debate that has a long critical tradition, irrelevant to the objectives of this essay, there is no doubt that the text leaves the way open for a reading in which Pamela's virtue is not an incontrovertible truth. Indeed, "the rapid and prolific accretion of satires, defenses, and debates that followed the publication of *Pamela* depend for their effect on the instability of the evidence of Pamela's virtue; that is, they exploit the idea that virtue, like virginity, can be faked" (Harol, 2006, p. 135).

5. To avoid going back too far in time, we could simply recall, for its acknowledged literary qualities, Taylor (1651).

6. Henceforth all references to the text will be to this edition; page numbers for quotations are given in round brackets at the end of the quotation itself.

7. Accentuating a technique already present in various sentimental novels of the 1760s and 1770s, from Sterne to Mackenzie, the openly declared omission, the fragment, also serve to indirectly confirm the authenticity of the documents presented. The existence of gaps leads the reader to believe that in an undetermined *earlier* time the pages were complete and actually available to a hypothetical reader: in practice, the authentication device (the found manuscript) finds a further foundation in reality precisely thanks to the *existence* of missing parts. See: Gardini (2014, pp. 19-20).

8. Even an incomplete list of the texts present, in recontextualized form, in Maturin's novel would include a high proportion of phrases drawn from the Bible; a substantial presence of Latin and Greek classics, from Homer to Virgil, from Pliny the Younger to Suetonius, from Zeno to Seneca, Cicero, Pindar, Juvenal; some great continental authors – Dante, Metastasio, Cervantes, Perrault, Diderot; above all very frequent borrowings from English literature, as if to compose a sort of embryonic native canon: Shakespeare (mostly the tragedies and the histories), Beaumont and Fletcher, Jonson, Milton, Dryden, the playwrights of the Restoration, Southerne, Pope, Fielding, Sterne, Gray, Garrick, Boswell, Radcliffe, Lewis. The intertextual nature of *Melmoth* is stressed by O'Sullivan (2016, p. 76). The "presence" of Homer, Virgil and Pliny in Maturin's novel is specifically investigated by González-Rivas Fernández (2008, pp. 37-54). The very detailed analysis is the premise for a much broader consideration: "En definitiva, se puede entender la literatura gótica como la primera relectura de la literatura grecolatina en clave no clasicista" (González-Rivas Fernández, 2008, p. 39). On the close relationship between Diderot's *La Religieuse* and *Melmoth*, see: Smith (1993, pp. 524-35). This polydiscursive mode is confirmed by the mixing of genres. See: Eggenschwiler (1975, pp. 165-81).

9. One of Freud's definitions of the subconscious, see: Bottiroli (2020, p. 141).

10. "Come Narcissi in sua spera mirando / s'inamorao per ombra alla fontana" (Davanzati, 1965, sonnet 26, v. 560).

The issue is well illustrated by Agamben (2006, pp. 97-8), with information and references summarized by Folena (2012a, p. 120n10). Wide-ranging analyses can be found in Goldin (1967); Vinge (1967).

11. References to the Comedy are widespread throughout the novel. See: Milbank (2018, particularly pertinent is Chapter III).

12. "Secondo questa teoria [...], gli oggetti sensibili imprimono nei sensi la loro forma e questa impressione sensibile, o immagine, o fantasma, [...] è poi ricevuta dalla fantasia, o virtù immaginativa, che la conserva anche in assenza dell'oggetto che l'ha prodotta" (Agamben, 2006, p. 82). Agamben's discourse is detailed in the chapters *Eros allo specchio*, *"Spiritus phantasticus"*, *Spiriti d'amore* and *Tra Narciso e Pigmalione* (2006, pp. 84-145).

References

Agamben G. (2006 [1977]), *Stanze. La parola e il fantasma nella cultura occidentale*, Einaudi, Torino.

Alighieri D. (1867), *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, trans. by Henry W. Longfellow, Ticknor and Fields, Boston.

Blake W. (1789), *The Book of Thel, copy J*, microfilm, Widener Library of the Harvard College Library (with kind permission).

Bottiroli G. (2020), *Desiderio di avere, desiderio di essere*, in A. M. Babbi, A. Comparini (a cura di), *Letteratura e altri saperi. Influssi, scambi, contaminazioni*, Carocci, Roma, pp. 141-71.

Bowers T. (1999), *Seduction Narratives and Tory Experience in Augustan England*, in "The Eighteenth Century", 40, 2, pp. 128-54.

Calasso R. (1988), *Le nozze di Cadmo e Armonia*, Adelphi, Milano.

Davanzati C. (1965), *Rime*, a cura di Aldo Menichetti, Commissione per i testi di lingua, Bologna.

Eggenschwiler D. (1975), Melmoth the Wanderer. *Gothic on Gothic*, in "Genre", 8, pp. 165-81.

Ferrari R. (1999), *"From Region to Region": gli spazi del gotico in "Melmoth the Wanderer" di C.R. Maturin* in "Rivista di Letterature Moderne e Comparate", 52, 4, pp. 327-50.

Folena L. (2012a), *Dove fioriva l'eloquenza: Satana seduttore nel "Paradise Lost"*, in L. Folena (a cura di), *Retoriche del discorso amoroso nella letteratura in inglese*, Trauben Editrice, Torino, pp. 119-48.

Folena L. (2012b), *La seduzione del linguaggio*, in L. Folena (a cura di), *Retoriche del discorso amoroso nella letteratura in inglese*, Trauben Editrice, Torino, pp. 7-35.

Gardini N. (2014), *Lacuna. Saggio sul non detto*, Einaudi, Torino.

Goldin F. (1967), *The Mirror of Narcissus in the Courtly Love Lyric*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.

González-Rivas Fernández A. (2008), *Melmoth, el fantasma de Charles R. Maturin. Regreso Espectral de la Literatura Grecolatina*, in "Epos", 24, pp. 37-54.

Harol C. (2006), *Enlightened Virginity in Eighteenth-Century Literature*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Kierkegaard S. (2017), *Diario del seduttore*, a cura di Susanna Mati, Demetra, Firenze.

Maturin C. R. (2008), *Melmoth the Wanderer*, ed. by Douglas Grant, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Milbank A. (2018), *God and the Gothic: Religion, Romance and Reality in the English Literary Tradition*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Null J. (1977), *Structure and Theme in* Melmoth the Wanderer, in "Papers on Language and Literature", 13, 2, pp. 133-47.

O'Sullivan K. M. C. (2016), *His Dark Ingredients. The Viscous Palimpsest of Charles Maturin's* Melmoth the Wanderer, in "Gothic Studies", 18, 2, pp. 74-84.

Pavel T. (2002), *Il romanzo alla ricerca di se stesso. Saggio di morfologia storica*, in F. Moretti (a cura di), *Il Romanzo. 2. Le Forme*, Einaudi, Torino, pp. 36-64.

Pepe P. (2015), *L'agonia del carnefice. Metamorfosi del Gotico in* The Monk *e* Dracula, in "Storie e Linguaggi", 1, 1, pp. 119-41.

Potter T. (2003), *Genre and Cultural Disruption: Libertinism and the Early English Novel*, in "ESC", 29, 1-2, pp. 171-96.

Praz M. (1976) (first edition 1930), *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica*, Sansoni Editore, Firenze.

Richetti J. J. (1992) (first edition 1969), *Popular Fiction Before Richardson. Narrative patterns: 1700-1739*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Shakespeare W. (2000) (first edition 1967), *Pericles*, ed. by F. David Hoeniger, Routledge, London.

Smith A. E. (1993), *Experimentation and "Horrid Curiosity" in Maturin's* Melmoth the Wanderer, in "English Studies", 6, pp. 524-35.

Stott G. St. J. (1987), *The Structure of* Melmoth the Wanderer, in "Études Irlandaises", 12, 1, pp. 41-52.

Taylor J. (1651), *The rule and exercises of holy dying in which are described the means and instruments of preparing our selves and others respectively, for a blessed death, and the remedies against the evils and temptations proper to the state of sicknesse: together with prayers and acts of vertue to be used by sick and dying persons, or by others standing in their attendance: to which are added rules for the visitation of the sick and offices proper for that ministery*, Printed for R.R. and are to be sold by Edward Martin, bookseller, London.

Vinge L. (1967), *The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature up to the Early 19th Century*, Gleerups, Lund.

Warner W. B. (2012 [2005]), *Novels on the Market*, in J. J. Richetti (ed.), *The Cambridge History of English Literature 1660-1780*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 87-105.