



# Politics and power in the Gothic drama of M.G. Lewis

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## Abstract

Matthew Lewis's 1796 novel *The Monk* continues to attract critical attention, but the accusation that it was blasphemous has overshadowed the rest of his writing career. He was also a playwright, M.P. and slave-owner. This thesis considers the need to reassess the presentation of social power, primarily that of a conservative paternalism, in Lewis's dramas and the impact of biographical issues upon this. As Lewis's critical reputation is currently built upon knowledge of him as a writer of „Gothic“ works, this thesis considers a range of his „Gothic“ plays. The Introduction explores the current academic understanding of Lewis and provides a rationale for the plays chosen. Chapter One explores how *The Monk* prefigures Lewis's dramas through its theatrical elements and Lewis's reaction to violence on the continent in the 1790s. The remainder of the thesis examines Lewis's deployment of three conventions of

Gothic drama in order to explore social power. Chapter Two discusses the presentation of the Gothic villain as one who usurps and abuses power through a focus on *The Castle Spectre*. Chapter Three considers Lewis's Gothic heroes in *Adelmorn, the Outlaw*; *Rugantino, or, the Bravo of Venice and Venoni*; or, the Novice of St. Mark's against his actions in Parliament and the trial by Court-Martial of his uncle General Whitelocke. Lewis uses these plays to advocate the qualities of mercy, benevolence and courage in those with jurisdiction over others. Chapter Four considers Lewis's use of Gothic spectacle in two 1811 plays, *One O' Clock!* or, the Knight and the Wood Daemon and *Timour the Tartar*, which return to a focus on usurpation. Factors considered include the use of Renaissance influences and Lewis's rift with his father. Finally, the Coda examines Lewis's attempts to put his theory of paternal power into practice when he inherited two Jamaican estates.



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## Contributors

Author: **Rachel Pearson**

Thesis advisor: [Emma Clery](#)

Thesis advisor: [David Glover](#)

## University divisions

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