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Ruins of the Abbey of Fitz-Martin [supplemental material]

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The Ruins of the Abbey of Fitz-Martin, by Thomas Isaac Horsely Curties.

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Full Title

The Ruins of the Abbey of Fitz-Martin

Summary

A corrupt Baron exploits the monks of St. Catherine's monastery by publicizing the acts of one Sr. St. Anna, a nun from the monastery that broke her vow of chastity. Under pressure from the scandal, the monks hand over the monastery to the Baron, who converts it into a

secular property that swiftly falls into ruins. Many years later, Thomas Fitz-Martin and his daughter Rosaline, the last descendants of this Baron, move into these ruins and discover that the Baron himself seduced Sr. St. Anna under the name of Vortimer, leading her to her ruin and eventual death. The ghost of Sr. St. Anna haunted the Baron until his own death.

Constellation of Knowledge/Historical Context

Additional notes: The "Anonymous" on the title page is misleading. This text was indeed written by Curties.

Inspirations for this work: Fairy-tale traditions, Curties' novel *St. Botolph's Priory; or the Sable Mask* (1806) published in the influential journal *The Flowers of Literature* for 1806.

Key Words

Abstraction

The Oxford English Dictionary records early 19th Century usage of "abstraction" as secret or dishonest removal of wealth; "abstraction" as the consideration of qualities independently of material substance, especially concerning wealth and property, came into use in the later part of the Century. Gothic narratives often explore notions of fractured identities and a sense of dislocation that is either or both spatial and psychological, but rising capitalism and the abstraction of wealth from physical property was among the biggest anxieties of the time, turning tangible security into an ephemeral, easily transferable insecurity.

In *Ruins of the Abbey of Fitz-Martin*, an abbey changes from church hands to secular hands in a very underhanded scheme by the Baron. This change results in the tangible structure of the abbey losing all its spiritual capital (as a religious institution); it also falls into a state of physical disrepair, perhaps reflecting the social anxieties about capital and wealth present at the time.

Source: Bok, Annabelle. "Gothic Keywords." <http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/ellgohbh/gothickeywords.html>. Last Updated 2006. Last Accessed 9/16/2013. Web.

Boundaries

Anne Williams in her book *The Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* suggests that Gothic literature is "pervasively organized around anxieties about boundaries (and boundary transgressions)" (Williams 16). Gothic literature, however, deals not only with boundaries (and transgressions) of "self and other"; it attempts also to show the problematic nature of boundaries in the first place. Social boundaries, for example, define what is correct, but at the same time repress the individual. Boundaries in Gothic fiction are often blurred, and things are never as clearly defined as they seem.

Boundaries create distinction, but they are also repressive in nature. Society lays down certain norms (boundaries) that individuals cannot transgress or risk being termed the 'Other'. People in attempting to stay within these boundaries naturally have to repress any desires that may transgress these socially placed boundaries. Boundaries are endless in

Gothic fiction; they constantly attempt to define what is correct, known and approved, but at the same time create more problems by their very act of categorization.

In Ruins of the Abbey of Fitz-Martin, the Baron oversteps his bounds as a member of the aristocracy that transgresses on holy power by swindling the monks of St. Catherine's out of their abbey. He also forcibly ruins a nun, which is a different (but related) transgression of holy boundaries.

Source: Ang, Ivan. "Gothic Keywords." <http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/ellgohbh/gothickeywords.html>. Last Updated 2006. Last Accessed 9/16/2013. Web.

Entrapment

Entrapment, a favorite horror device of the Gothic, means to be confined or to be trapped in such a way that there is no way out. It is this sense of there being no escape that contributes to the claustrophobic psychology of Gothic space. The notion of claustrophobia is closely tied up with that of entrapment. Although it is most often regarded as a consequence of physical entrapment, it can also be more generally attributed to a character's sense of helplessness, or a feeling that one is caught up in some sinister plan or destiny over which one has no control.

In Ruins of the Abbey of Fitz-Martin, the nun Sister St. Anna is confined for a short period, but the Baron's entrapment of the monks of St. Catherine's in scandal/blackmail is perhaps more significant. The memoirs of Sister St. Anna are also found entombed in a confining coffin.

Source: Leong, Esther. "Gothic Keywords." <http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/ellgohbh/gothickeywords.html>. Last Updated 2006. Last Accessed 9/16/2013. Web.

Female Sexuality

Aspects of female sexuality figure prominently in gothic literature insofar as there is a strong preoccupation with what may happen if female sexuality is not contained within the structures of patriarchal authority across many Gothic texts. In Ruins of the Abbey of Fitz-Martin, the threat of a female nun (sister St. Anna) violating her vows of chastity is so great that the monks of St. Catherine's Abbey are forced to vacate the premises and hand over its control to a secular authority (the Baron). Sister St. Anna is also powerful in and of herself; her sexual degradation leads to her becoming a vengeful spirit that haunts the Baron to his death.

Source: Lin, Ashley. "Gothic Keywords." <http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/ellgohbh/gothickeywords.html>. Last Updated 2006. Last Accessed 9/16/2013. Web.

Memory of Past Sins

In The Ruins of the Abbey of Fitz-Martin, the current heir is haunted by the past crime of his ancestor, so much so that Thomas Fitz-Martin's daughter, Rosaline, is caught up in a ghost hunt which results in her discovery of a macabre coffin epistolary novel that implicates the Baron (her direct ancestor as well as her father's) in the degradation and murder of a nun. The memory of this crime is etched in the ruin of the abbey itself—its

spiritual bankruptcy is mirrored in its physical decay. Thomas Fitz-Martin hopes to set things right, but he is only allowed to do so after the past crime is brought to light.

Religion

Christianity is both very much present and absent in Gothic literature. There is a disturbing sense that God is strangely absent, or at best, distant, within many Gothic works. God's power seems limited—captured and contained within material shapes and symbols such as the Host, Indulgences, and the Crucifix. The men who hunt down Dracula, for instance, are dependent on the trappings of religion without true substance. Christianity thus becomes reduced to transferable property.

In *The Ruins of the Abbey of Fitz-Martin*, religious property changes hands—and changes functions—based on the strictures of the Catholic faith. By violating her vow of chastity (unwillingly), sister St. Anna becomes a religious instrument that the Baron uses to gain secular power and deprive the abbey of its once-holy use and purpose.

Source: Minghui, Fong. "Gothic Keywords." <http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/ellgohbh/gothickeywords.html>. Last Updated 2006. Last Accessed 9/16/2013. Web.

Secrets

Secrets, namely that which is unspeakable, is a distinctive gothic trope. Often, a foreboding shadow is cast upon those who withhold secrets, be it a dark family history or a Faustian wherein 'unspeakable' knowledge allows men (and women?) to transcend the limits and abilities of humans, eventually at the expense of their sanity, friends and lives. Secrets as a form of concealment also connote darkness and acts as a means of subversion against the façade of the hypocritical Victorian society which boasts a well-policed state with brightly-lit streets at night, claiming the honorability of well-clothed individuals and the safety of the private self, all which the gothic trope seeks to challenge.

In *The Ruins of the Abbey of Fitz-Martin*, multiple secrets are at work. Sister St. Anna does not know the identity of her mysterious lover Vortimer, and it is not a first known what specific scandal caused the abbey of Fitz-Martin to be transferred over to the Baron's (aka Vortimer's) hands. The circumstances of sister St. Anna's death also remain secret until Thomas Fitz-Martin and his daughter Rosaline uncover her history many generations down the line. The power of secrets only remains until they are discovered—and they are always (eventually) discovered. In typical gothic fiction, the secrets might lead to an unhappy ending; in this chapbook, the revelation of the secrets provides a sort of exorcism or peace for the abbey and sister St. Anna.

Source: Yuqi, Kong. "Gothic Keywords." <http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/ellgohbh/gothickeywords.html>. Last Updated 2006. Last Accessed 9/16/2013. Web.

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