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The Vindictive Monk, by Isaac Crookenden.

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Full Title

The Vindictive Monk or The Fatal Ring

Summary

Calini discovers he is a foundling, abandoned as an infant with a ring left among his. The story continues with Calini as an adult, returning from the home of his beloved, Alexa. Calini is suddenly taken hostage and locked in a dungeon by Sceloni, a monk. It is later discovered that Calni's kidnapping is a plot by Signor Holbruzi to steal Alexa. The plot was to kill Calini, but Sceloni chooses to secretly imprison Calini instead. Holbruzi pursues Alexa. He is unsuccessful, as Alexa remains devoted to Calini. Frustrated in his attempts, Holbruzi demands that Sceloni kidnap Alexa and bring her to Holbruzi, after which he refuses to pay Sceloni for his services. Sceloni decides to leave Holbruzi and revenge himself against him by luring Holbruzi to an empty dungeon where Sceloni claims Calini is hidden. When Holbruzi enters the dungeon to kill Calini, Sceloni, shoots him.

Sceloni decides to kill Calini as well. However, when he goes to Calini, he discovers the ring Calini was left as a baby. Sceloni reveals he is Calini's true father. Sceloni reveals that he married an unwilling maiden. Because of their unhappy marriage, Sceloni suspected his wife of adultery, believing her ring was a token from a lover and that the infant Calini was illegitimate. In a jealous rage, Sceloni kills his wife and abandons his son, only to discover that his wife was innocent. Sceloni releases Calini who deduces that Alexa must be a captive in Holbruzi's home. Calini rescues her and the two are married. Sceloni retires to the convent.

Constellation of Knowledge/Historical Context

The author of *The Vindictive Monk*, Isaac Crookenden, was a prolific writer of Gothic literature in the 18th and 19th century. While Crookenden was an assistant schoolmaster by trade, he was equally well known for his numerous gothic bluebooks (of which *The Vindictive Monk* is one) that adapted plots from famous gothic novels. The genre, while similar to gothic chapbooks, is unique in its attention to audience. Gothic bluebooks were geared towards middle and upper class young readers who sought lighter reading material. Crookenden's bluebooks were most often characterized by a focus on incest and a moral lesson at the end (attributes of many bluebook tales).

Given Crookenden's background with abridging gothic novels, it is no surprise that the plot of *The Vindictive Monk* is also borrowed from a longer work. While some scholars have pointed to the similarities between the chapbook and Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (mostly based on recurring tropes), the more obvious source for Crookenden's adaptation is Anne Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797). Indeed, the chapbook's character Sceloni is clearly a replica of Radcliffe's scheming monk Schedoni. The notable differences scholars have noted are Crookenden's gender reversal from Radcliffe's novel, as Schedoni's female employer is replaced for Sceloni by a male nobleman, and Schedoni's daughter Elena becomes Sceloni's son, Calini. The clear adaptation (some would say plagiarism) of famous gothic novels is common in Crookenden's work and, indeed, in many of the chapbooks and bluebooks of the period, as this lighter literature sought to capitalize on the popularity of gothic tales.

Key Words

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.

The establishment of the boundary between the self and other is important in Gothic fiction for everything that the Self is not is projected onto the Other. In Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Frankenstein’s monster is clearly the Other for he, at least physically, has come to represent everything that the other normal looking characters are not. The idea of “self and other” extends also to geographical boundaries, where everything within the boundary of civilized world is good and everything beyond it is either seen as exotic or dangerous. In Stoker’s *Dracula*, London is seen as civilized and safe (at least prior the arrival of Dracula) and everything in Romania is considered to be dark, ominous and dangerous.

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. It can be argued that Dr. Jekyll’s creation Mr. Hyde is an attempt to remain respectable at all times, as defined by the societal boundaries.

Lastly, boundaries can be blurred as we see in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, for is it really possible to create a boundary within oneself? The fact the Jekyll goes to bed as himself and wakes up as Hyde suggests that not only are boundaries problematic, it can also be easily blurred. *Dracula* too, represents a blurring of the boundaries between the living and the dead, He is not dead, but he is not alive as well, hence he is called the “Un-Dead”, which is really an oxymoron.

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.

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

Entrapment

Entrapment, a favourite 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.

There are essentially three types of entrapment: physical, mental, and existential. Physical entrapment would mean being physically trapped in some place. A recurring gothic device of physical entrapment is that of the protagonist trapped in a maze of some kind and trying to escape, but inevitably returning to the same spot again and again. An example of physical entrapment can be found in Stoker's *Dracula*. When Harker is being driven to the castle of Dracula, he experiences a moment of being physically trapped in the nightmare landscape of the Transylvania, as is evident in his remark that "[it] seemed to me that we were simply going over and over the same ground again; and so I took note of some salient point, and found that this was so" (Stoker). Another example of such entrapment is found in Smith's "A Rendezvous in Averigogne." In this short story, the protagonist Gerard is trying in vain to escape from a forest; he returns, inevitably, to the same spot every time. Eventually, "[his] very will was benumbed, was crushed down as by the incumbence of a superior volition" (Smith).

Mental entrapment, on the other hand, is about being confined to a certain state of mind. The gothic trope of madness, for example, is a form of mental entrapment. In a way, the insane are trapped in their own mental universe, into which no one else can penetrate. Renfield, in *Dracula*, is doubly entrapped; physically locked up in an asylum, he is also limited to the confines of his mental universe, doomed to be continually misunderstood by Seward, or simply dismissed as insane.

Lastly, there is also existential entrapment, which takes the form of social entropy and ontological or epistemological entrapment. An example of existential entrapment can be found in Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*; Dr Jekyll feels trapped by societal notions of respectability, by a constant pressure of having to uphold his reputation as a gentleman in the eyes of the Victorian public. As a way of breaking out of this 'prison', Dr Jekyll invents the figure of Hyde. Hyde is therefore Jekyll's liberator, for it is as Hyde that Dr Jekyll can truly express himself, unbound by considerations of maintaining his respectability.

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

Family

Industrial development in the Nineteenth century encouraged urbanization and by 1850 more than half of England lived in cities and worked in industries. This changing economic condition inevitably challenged conventional ideology of the family which became redefined to include members "whether actually living together or not" and "connected by (either) blood or affinity" (OED).

By this definition, the patriarchal figure became freed from monogamy. Dracula, as symbol of the new money-obsessed class, had three vampire wives. Similarly, with ready money, many figures of authority were in command of the imp-child. Instead of a genealogical right, the new capitalist society allows wealth to gain patriarchal authority over many.

While the new factory communities introduced new figures of authority, with respect to cloth and steel, production becomes increasingly specifically gendered. Through personifying industrial production, Gothic tropes seem to suggest via Frankenstein and Dracula that while possible, the resultant single-parent offspring are unnatural and terrifying.

At the same time, economically active working class women and the 'masculine' New Woman threatened conventional notions of feminine dependency. Writers like Stevenson reacted by only presenting negative working women (in both sense of the word) while Stoker singles intellectual Mina out for Dracula's sanction.

Proliferation of child labor positioned children as 'property generating property' as exemplified in *The Bottle Imp*. Dracula's brute beast children also aid his creation of vampire children. The horror of the four female vampires' feeding off children is an implicit gothic comment on the inhumane nature of this exploitation.

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

Hero/Villain

Description forthcoming.

Identificatory Talisman

Description forthcoming.

Intertextuality

Gothic intertextuality can be seen as a vampiric form of drawing elements from other texts, of sucking key ideas and characteristics into its own narrative body to nourish and enrich itself. Intertextuality exists everywhere in all literary genres, but Gothic intertextuality stands apart from the usual usage as it both subverts and perverts the original meanings and intentions of the original text, in a bid to overturn, question and invert its significance. Examples of this can be seen in both Frankenstein and *Jekyll and Hyde*, where Biblical references are made for the sole purpose of challenging and undermining its religious import, thus constituting a form of blasphemous truncation. In the latter novel, Ephesians 2:14 is used to refer to how Jekyll has used science to split himself into two beings, thus deviating from and upending the original Biblical meaning. The multiplicity of jarring intertextual sources used in Gothic texts also works to create deliberate dissonance and deep destabilisation within its narratives, being in line with how the Gothic as a genre seeks to critically interrogate, topple and displace existing social norms and beliefs, of revealing the darker nature of the self and society that lies hidden within. A key example would be the use of Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in Frankenstein, where the Romantic journey motif is subverted by how there is no proper end or closure to Walton and Victor's physical and scientific journeys undertaken, thus refuting the possible positive ending to Coleridge's poem.

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

Missing Mother

The typical gothic mother is absent or dead. If the mother is alive and well, such as Lucy's mother in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, she is associated with the incapacity to carry out her maternal duties. The typical gothic mother has to be killed in order for the domestic instability that underpins the gothic text to flourish. Only the occasional evil or deviant mother (Olalla's mother in Robert Louis Stevenson's "Olalla" for example), is allowed to survive in the gothic text. Even then, the evil and deviant mother figure (such as H.R. Haggard's titular character in *She*) has to be removed eventually for there to be some sort of closure to the gothic text.

The repression of the mother allows the progression of the narrative in the gothic mode. The missing mother also serves as a social commentary where her absence and silence highlight the repression of women within an overwhelming patriarchal regime.

The missing mother points to the absence of regulation and the absence of stability in the family, hence the desire for the male characters to usurp the maternal role and circumvent the female's role in procreation (Victor Frankenstein and Dr Jekyll do that in their respective fictional worlds). At the same time, the missing mother is a signifier for the stranglehold of men over the legal and physical self-agency of the women in gothic texts.

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

Purity

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines purity as the quality or condition of being pure in various aspects. In general, it signifies "faultlessness, correctness", and especially "freedom from matter that contaminates, defiles, corrupts, or debases; physical cleanness". The idea of purity is also specifically relevant to the individual, denoting an unblemished character, innocence, and the condition of "chastity, ceremonial cleanness" in one of the earliest uses of the word.

In gothic literature, the issue of purity is commonly a source of anxiety, having religious, social, and even political significance. The anxiety begins very probably as a result of a Judeo-Christian religious heritage; because God is pure and cannot abide impurity, sinful man has to continually struggle between holy and earthly desires. This physically unbridgeable distance between God and man is further strained by the threat of rejection "...Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." in 2 Corinthians 6:17, The Holy Bible (New International Version).

In all other associations, one may see the great concern with purity through the extent to which the idea of mixture, invasion and corruption play a part in gothic narratives such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, R.L. Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. For instance, each of these narratives purports to tell a tale or report a strange case, but the integrity of each narrative is compromised by the epistolary form that is inevitably subjective and incomplete in knowledge. In addition, the heterogeneity of voices—especially in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *Dracula*—suggests the difficulty of sustaining a single correct perspective. The threat of impurity is consequently played out in

the struggle between human and monstrous protagonists, the overarching human anxiety being aptly voiced by Frankenstein when he expressed the fear that “a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror” (160). In short, purity means such a lot in gothic literature because the alternative is an uncontrollable, and therefore unsafe, sublimity.

Source: Tan Su Linn. "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. In literary novels, secrets are knowledge deliberately concealed from the readers and/or from the characters involved. In gothic literature, secrets aid in creating a sense of suspense, hinging on a scandal or mystery and subsequently lead to a shocking revelation at the end. Often, a foreboding shadow is cast upon those who withhold secrets, be it a dark family history or a Faustian pact as exemplified by Shelley’s Frankenstein and Stevenson’s Dr Jekyll who are both possessors of an ‘unspeakable’ knowledge which allows them to transcend the limits and abilities of man but eventually at the expense of their sanity, friends and lives.

The secrecy of identity and sexuality is also prevalent in Gothic literature where the ambiguity and anonymity of informers and correspondents add to the overarching mystery. There are also suggestions that the seemingly upright life led by Victorian men in the day is coupled with a lurid ‘secret’ life at night where at times even their heterosexual preferences are called into question. Although not overtly articulated, novels such as Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde reveal a generally homosocial society whereby the fast bonding of the men hints at something more than platonic friendship.

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 honourability of well-clothed individuals and the safety of the private self, all which the gothic trope seeks to challenge.

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

Violence

Violence, like over-determined symbols in Gothic literature, functions as much as an act of social interrogation as it is an act of affirmation. In both Frankenstein and Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, strict social mores and policing that prompt the disastrous, transgressive reactions of repressed selves are manifested in the physical violence wrought by Frankenstein’s and Dr Jekyll’s doubles, the monster and Mr Hyde. Here, violence also highlights class anxieties where the repressed working class, like Frankenstein’s self-educated monster, rebels violently against social masters like Frankenstein. Human superficiality that incites Frankenstein’s monster’s violence also operates to reflect the monstrosity in society itself.

Apart from interrogating social norms, scientific advancement and its monstrous power, building on the Promethean over-reacher theme, are also examined in its production of violent figures and emotional violence, like that experienced by Frankenstein and Dr Lanyon after witnessing what science can achieve. Here, gothic atavism of regression alongside material and scientific progress is manifested in the figures of Jekyll and Hyde, where the latter's regression is demonstrated in his ape-like appearance and, more significantly, in his disregard of human moral codes—his violence. Yet, while violence undermines and questions the adequacies of law, it also serves to affirm social codes. The violence of staking in Dracula, for instance, acts as a social cleansing ritual of removing figures that threaten social instability and miscegenation. Here, the violence of staking Lucy, as is the mutilation of Elizabeth in Frankenstein, also takes on phallic terms to affirm masculinity in an age of increasing sexual anxieties.

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

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Alternate Editions: Crookenden, Isaac. *Romantic Tales. The Revengeful Turk: Or Mystic Cavern. The Distressed Nun: Or Sufferings of Herselia Di Brindoli of Florence. And the Vindictive Monk: Or Fatal Ring*. London: S. Fisher, 1802. Print.

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