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Priory of St. Clair [supplemental material]

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Priory of St. Clair, by Sarah Scudgell Wilkinson.

Contents

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Full Title

Priory of St. Clair; Or Spectre of the Murdered Nun. A Gothic Tale.

Summary

The Archbishop of Rouen had the ability to pardon a condemned criminal once a year. One such pardon was that of Lewis Chabot, Count de Valvé.

Intrigued by an overheard conversation, Lewis goes to the Priory of St. Clair where he witnessed Julietta reluctantly making her nun's vows. He is unable to forget her, so bribes the under gardener, Alexis, to carry letters proclaiming his passion and desire to free her from the nunnery. Julietta refuses him.

Lewis then procures a potent liquor that will, when drunk, simulate death. Julietta drinks it unknowingly and Alexis and Lewis carry away the coffin that contains her body. When she wakes, Julietta continues in her refusal of him. Since Julietta is obdurate in her refusal, Lewis makes her his unwilling mistress. One night he catches her trying to escape through the chapel in his castle and murders her as she clings, shrieking, to the altar.

Six months later, Lewis marries, but his marriage is troubled by his odd behaviour, brought on by the fact that he's being haunted by the spectre of Julietta. He is also being blackmailed by Alexis and attempts to murder him. This attempt results in his arrest and condemnation to burn at the stake. Granted the pardon by the Archbishop of Rouen, Lewis goes abroad, enters a monastery, and dies, penitent, three years later. Isabel remarries and her son grows up and marries the niece of the murdered Julietta.

Constellation of Knowledge/Historical Context

Sarah Scudgell Wilkinson was a prolific writer who struggled to earn her living as an author Among her many works was a variety of Gothic chapbooks. Within this line of work, "Wilkinson's most important attribute as a bluebooker was the ability to construct clear and simple story lines free from dense subplotting that often encumbered Gothic novels" (Potter). She often confronted the horror of secret, arranged, or forced marriages as illustrated by *Spectre of the Nun* in which Julietta is confined and threatened in an attempt to force her into marriage.

In writing her Gothic fiction, Wilkinson was able to call upon tropes and themes from the Gothic fiction which preceded her own, most notably the novels of Anne Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis, and the bluebooks of Eliza Parsons. "What Wilkinson does is to blend the pleasing

aesthetics and the enticing suspension of terror found in Radcliffe and the rapidity of horrifying shocks distinctive of Lewis" (Potter). One of the strongest influences apparent in *Spectre of the Nun* is that of Matthew Lewis. Including a quote directly from Lewis, there are also echoes of Lewis throughout, especially in the opening scene of the overheard conversation within the church - which calls to mind Lewis' own opening scene in *The Monk*. The use of a draught to simulate death is reminiscent of, though not identical to, the drugging of Antonia. "Her heroes and heroines are archetypal Radcliffe . . . predictably positioned in a Lewisite landscape of spectres and blood." Wilkinson is able to successfully weave together different strains of Gothic in order to write semi-original stories with all the familiarity, thrills, and ideology of the tradition.

Key Words

Blood

The significance of blood in gothic literature can be illustrated in many aspects. At the elementary level, blood denotes genealogy, lineages and procreation. This denotation has historical significance for the gothic text to either construct or recall its origins. Extending genealogy to the family, what we often associate as 'blood is thicker than water' is challenged in the gothic texts like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* that foreground certain anxieties within the family structure such as in the relationships between fathers and sons, husbands and wives. What we know as 'blue blood' reminds us at once of the aristocracy and nobility. The gothic texts in the Victorian era were concerned with the rise of the bourgeois class, a liminal force itself that threatened to destabilise the ruling power of the former elite. Therefore, the gothic treatment of blood sometimes focuses on the purity and tainted ness of blood like in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to highlight then contemporary societal anxieties.

Blood, due to its ability to be transfused between humans, can be treated as a transactional currency in the gothic text as exemplified in Stoker's *Dracula*. This co-modification of blood is highly significant as it reflects the anxiety of the genre towards increasing dominion of capitalism and industrialisation especially in the 19th century that threatened traditional ways of life.

Blood in the gothic text can too connote sexuality and the libido. In *Dracula*, Dracula and his thirst for blood highlight a libidinous nature that arises from his 'eastern' hence different origins. Blood has the further implications of gender and race as despite its physical omnipresence between genders and across races, the perceptions of blood cannot but be influenced by perceptions of race and gender.

The ambivalence of blood's dual functionality as a life-giver and yet also a life-denier highlights the liminal space that blood occupies in the gothic genre. Stoker's Dracula is the epitome of a character who both denies and yet gives 'life' to his victims. The 'liminality' of blood, along with other gothic motifs such as the dual-door house in Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and Victor's ambivalent monster in *Frankenstein* who is both inhumane yet humane are all characteristic of the genre.

The notion of blood as a life-giver is further extended by the religious connotations of blood itself. The blood of Biblical Christ who had sacrificed himself on the cross for mankind's

salvation had been subverted in Stoker's Dracula when Dracula, now possibly perceived as the Anti-Christ who consumes his victim's blood instead of giving blood for salvation. Without doubt, we need the bloody key to open the door to the gothic world.
Source: James Tan. "Gothic Keywords."
http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/ellgohbh/gothickeywords.html. Last Updated 2006. Last Accessed 9/16/2013. Web.

Castle
Description forthcoming.

Criminal
Description forthcoming.

Death
Gothic literature is obsessed with death. We find portents of death, unnatural deaths, and series of deaths (e.g. *Frankenstein*), all of which contribute to an atmosphere of horror. Death in Gothic literature is associated with the supernatural. If Gothic literature reflects a wish to overcome one's mortality, there is also a fear of those who somehow manage to transcend it e.g. She, vampires, Frankenstein's monster.
In Gothic literature, death is horrific because it is often not quite the end. This thwarts the human wish for certainty. The vampires who are Undead occupy a liminal space; they are at once both alive and dead. The vampire hunters in *Dracula* have to drive a stake into them, to make sure they are really dead. There is also the trope of the dead who return e.g. Poe's "Ligeia". These kinds of spectres can also be seen as manifestations of the return of the repressed.
Likewise, the subject of death itself has often been ignored or repressed. It is what is unknown, and poses a threat to the Victorian mind which desires order. The Gothic is interested in what has been glossed over. We don't really get sentimental scenes like the death of little William in *East Lynne*; rather, the more gruesome, inexplicable aspects of death are explored. The corporeality of the body is emphasised with gory descriptions of blood and grave worms. Reading about death serves as a reminder of one's mortality. There is also a Gothic obsession with the bodies of dead women. Poe said that the death of a beautiful woman is "the most poetical topic in the world". For a discussion on death, femininity and the aesthetic, see Elizabeth Bronfen's book *Over her Dead Body*. She suggests that Gothic writing itself may be an act of killing off the female as it transmits the animate body into inanimate text. Necrophiliac desire for the dead woman e.g. Heathcliff's digging of Catherine's grave, also points to other kinds of transgressions e.g. incest..
Source: Khoo Lilin. "Gothic Keywords."
http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/ellgohbh/gothickeywords.html. Last Updated 2006. Last Accessed 9/16/2013. Web.

Draught/Medicine
Description forthcoming.

Ghost/Spectre/Phantom
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 destabalisation 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.

Libertine
Description forthcoming.

Nobility
Description forthcoming.

Overheard Conversation
Description forthcoming.

Pardon
Description forthcoming.

Prioress
Description forthcoming.

Reluctant Nun
Description forthcoming.

Supernatural
Description forthcoming.

Vows

Description forthcoming.

Bibliography of Related Information

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