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Ethelred & Lidania [supplemental material]

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Ethelred & Lidania; OR, The Sacrifice to Woden, by Sarah Scudgell Wilkinson.

Contents

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Full Title
Ethelred and Lidania; or, the Sacrifice to Woden.

Summary
The story is set in the medieval period and begins with Sir Ethelred, a superstitious but tolerant pagan knight, caught in a storm at sea with his Christian tutor and friend, Aribert. He was returning from a visit to a Count's daughter, who his wealthy but overbearing pagan father wanted him to marry. Desperate to survive the storm, he invokes the Saxon god Woden to save him, promising to sacrifice the first person to greet him at his home. The weather calms, and Ethelred returns home. Happy to have survived, he immediately greets his wife. He quickly remembers his vow and starts off to his father's house the next morning, determined to bring the matter to the priests of Woden. Upon arrival, he finds his father dead on a funeral pyre. Ethelred inherits his father's estate and becomes the Baron. He then goes to consult the priests of Woden, who declare that Lidania can live if she renounces her Christian faith. She refuses, and prepares to be sacrificed for Ethelred's vow. Upon seeing this, Ethelred converts to Christianity and declares that he would sacrifice himself with his beloved wife. Right before they are killed, Lidania's brother Lucius arrives with a declaration from the sovereign, a convert to Christianity, prohibiting human sacrifices to Woden. After Ethelred's conversion, most Saxons in Britain convert, and he and Lidiana live to see their granddaughter married to the King of England.

Constellation of Knowledge/Historical Context
Sarah Scudgell Wilkinson was a prolific writer of chapbooks who is known, in part, for her chapbooks on domestic horror, including that within convents and monasteries. *Ethelred and Lidania* is a work which constructs a medieval world where the national identity of Britain as a civilized, Christian nation is still threatened by pagan superstition and ritualism. This ties the story to the tradition of anti-Catholic ideology in the Gothic, as it is implicitly paralleling the cruel, irrational priests of Woden with Catholic priests and their barbaric religious rituals and practices. The story primarily critiques the Saxon religion of Sir Ethelred and his fanatical father while writing a favorable history of the union between the brave Saxons and civilized Britons in the medieval period. This history may have served as a reminder to the original reading population and a way of expressing the continuity of a historical national identity.

In this work, there are echoes of earlier Gothic works, most notably, Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). *Ethelred and Lidania* is very concerned with bloodlines and though the supernatural element is not nearly as overarching as it is in Walpole's work, the specter of the pagan Woden hangs over the story until being ousted at the end of the story by the legal mandate forbidding sacrifices.

Her work invokes the didactic capacities of Gothic literature that can be seen the works of sentimental fiction. *Ethelred and Lidania* expresses a clear and simple moral lesson regarding the backwardness of paganism and the virtues of British womanhood.

Key Words

Atavism

The term atavism is usually used to express the recurrence or reappearance of certain 'primitive' traits, physical or psychical, which presumably match those of an ancestral form. This notion of reversion and evolutionary 'throwbacks' was closely linked to criminality and class anxieties (see http://www.criminology.fsu.edu/crimtheory/lombroso.htm for more information about Cesare Lombroso's theory of the born deviant) in the nineteenth century, and often serves an interesting function mostly in fin de siecle gothic literature, particularly texts (such as R.L Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, A.C Doyle's *Hound of the Baskervilles* or H.G Well's *The Island of Dr Moreau*) which engage with bodily monstrosity and pseudo-scientific discourses about degeneration.

Urban problems of rising crime and poverty, as well as post-Darwinian anxieties about the increasing destabilization of human identity in late Victorian society seem to become embodied and 'safely' displaced through the repugnant form of the regressive atavistic human, whose moral and behavioral aberrations are pre-figured through his/her animalistic physiognomy. As such, tropes of degeneration such as blood, heredity, bestiality and even crumbling structures or spaces that are tied to a stagnant but still potent past frequently crop up in various gothic texts. In imperial-colonial gothic discourse, these atavistic elements can be read as a reflection of anxieties about the decay of the gentry and the declining colonial enterprise.

Gothic narratives typically subvert and complicate these conventional perceptions of the 'social other' by problematizing the supposedly clear (but ultimately revealed as superficial or at the least, unreliable) distinctness between the 'proper', respectable self and its anti-thesis. Via characteristic gothic devices such as doubling, irony and linguistic /narrative indeterminacy (which highlight the uneasy closeness between these two binaristic oppositions), the geographically, socially and/or biologically transgressive figure of the atavist becomes even more perturbing because he/she blurs the established boundaries drawn between the civilized and the savage, mirroring back to society its own fears and concerns (racial decline, the overlapping of animal and human, etc). Thus, the atavistic being not only presents a direct threat to civilization, but even more disturbingly, undermines the scientific taxonomies and social classifications that it rests on from within.

For more detailed examples of such readings about the atavist's function in gothic literature, see Kelly Hurley's *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the 'Fin de siecle'* or Stephen Arata's article "The Sedulous ape: Atavism, Professionalism, and Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde.*"

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

Domesticity
Description forthcoming.

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.

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 Averiogne." 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."

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 (Economical)
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.

National Origins
Description forthcoming.

Occultism
Occultism, in relation to ordinary knowledge, is as the esoteric is to the exoteric. Etymologically, 'occult' means 'concealed' and is unrelated to 'cult' which means 'worship' but the genre of the Gothic makes a cult out of the occult. The esoteric societies taught theories that differed considerably from modern science but had as much claim on public imagination at a time when Christian orthodoxy was being challenged and reinforced.

The Occult sciences were based on the ancient schemata of the four qualities (hot, cold, moist, dry), the four humors (blood, choler, phlegm, bile), the four elements (fire, air, water, earth) and the four temperaments (choleric, sanguine, phlegmatic, melancholy). Following a pre-Copernican perspective, traditional occult sciences form a hierarchy reaching from the study of alchemy (concerned with the terrestrial world) to astrology (the influences of the celestial bodies) and cabbalism (the 'super-celestial' or the archetypal world). Using

natural or white magic, an occultist may divine the workings of the universe; or may influence the course of events to personal ends through black or malefic magic.

The novelist Charles Williams (1886-1945) was one of the many prominent writers affiliated with esoteric societies and he presents many ideas of the occult in his novels where the motive force behind the stories is the human desire to find order in a chaos of esoteric teachings. Occult ideology is shown to enter an otherwise traditionally Christian world of the Victorian novelist in the early 20th Century.

Source: Nicole Kwan, "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 purposes 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 voice 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 uncontainable, 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.

Religion

Christianity is both very much present and absent in Gothic literature. In Dracula, religion features prominently in the fight against the vampire – Van Helsing, Harker and Mina frequently invoke the name of God for supernatural and divine aid against the power of Dracula. Yet, there is also a disturbing sense that God is strangely absent, or at best, distant, within the novel. 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 are dependent on the trappings of religion without true substance. Christianity thus becomes reduced to transferable property.

God is also sidelined in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. On one hand, while Biblical allusions to God as Creator abound in the novel, it is always in juxtaposition to the transgression of Victor Frankenstein as the mad scientist. Again, God is invoked only when an immediate threat is identified, as Victor laments and appeals to God to grant him the strength to defeat and destroy his monster. Christianity as the dominant religion in nineteenth century England was thoroughly interrogated and questioned, its beliefs in an Almighty God challenged as science and technology assumed prominence. Gothic authors, themselves questioning the relevance of religion, foregrounded these issues by presenting Christianity in a dubious light – present, but altogether powerless, shallow and somewhat deficient.

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

Weather

Weather plays an important function in gothic literature, and remains one of the keys in decoding the inner landscape of the protagonists. Often present in gothic novels not only as a form of sympathetic background, certain elements of weather are typically used to mirror and magnify the feelings of the protagonist, to establish moods, and to underscore the action of the story. For instance, the use of fog within the gothic novel is a convention often used to obscure objects by reducing visibility and changing the outward appearances of truth; and storms, when they make their appearance, frequently accompany important events and characters. Bad weather, in particular, is often associated with the supernatural, as well as being the birthing landscape of the imagination. Storms are perceived as harbingers of evil, and often present both a reflection and refraction of the inner self of the protagonist, an externalization of internal fears and conflict. Weather can also function as a site of displacement of fears, when they are projected onto the storm itself. In Le Fanu's novel Uncle Silas, the main protagonist, Maud's fears for her future after her father's death are both underscored by the approaching storm, and also displaced onto it.
Weather has also acquired a certain predictability in its interpretation in gothic literature; a feature that can easily be, and is often parodied in gothic works. There is the sense that readers are habitually lured into reading the weather as codes signifying the protagonist's inner landscape, and are ultimately unable to resist assuming heavily overdetermined meanings in the relationship between the weather and the inner self, thereby illustrating the gothic nature of the text by tempting one to oversimplify its reading, and yet

simultaneously contributing to the destabilizing sense of gothic unease by having its meaning perceived through a different set of codes that are ultimately arbitrary.
Source: Chang Keng Mun, "Gothic Keywords."
http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/ellgohbh/gothickeywords.html. Last Updated 2006. Last Accessed 9/16/2013. Web.

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