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Almagro & Claude [supplemental material]

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Almagro & Claude, by An Unknown Author

Contents

MLA Citation	1
MLA Citation from the Gothic Archive.....	1
Full Title.....	2
Summary.....	2
Constellation of Knowledge/Historical Context	2
Key Words	4
Anti-Catholic.....	4
Apparition.....	4
Banditti	4
Blood	4
Castle.....	4
Entrapment.....	4
Forced Vows	5
Genealogy	5
Intertextuality	5
Love.....	5
Melancholy	5
Monk	5
Motherhood.....	5
Wicked Abbess	6
Bibliography of Related Information.....	6

MLA Citation

Almagro & Claude, or the Monastic Murder. London: T. Plummer, c. 1805

MLA Citation from the Gothic Archive

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Full Title

Almagro & Claude, or the Monastic Murder.

Summary

Almagro and Claude is a direct extraction from Matthew Lewis' *The Monk*, retelling the banditti inset tale and incorporating the bleeding nun narrative.

The Marquis d'Axala changes his name to Don Almagro to conceal his rank, and begins his travels. On his way to Stasbourg, he is stranded in the woods at night, and ends up staying along with the Baroness Wildenheim in a woodcutter's hut. Tipped off by the housemistress, Antonia, Don Almagro concludes that he and the Baroness have fallen into the hands of some banditti in disguise. Using the element of surprise, he attacks in conjunction with Antonia, and defeats the leader of the banditti, successfully carrying the Baroness back to her husband. Antonia turns out to be the Baron's long-lost daughter, and is received with open arms. The Baron promptly assigns his men to the chase, and they capture sixty banditti in the woods. While at castle Wildenheim, Don Almagro hears about Claude, the niece of the Baroness, who is about to be forced to take vows as a nun. Almagro decides to rescue Claude, and soon wins her esteem. Claude advises him to try to win the affections of her aunt, but the old lady falls in love with him instead, and he is forced to leave the castle. Claude then decides to disguise herself as the bleeding nun and affect her escape when the nun is expected to be about the castle. Almagro places her in this disguise into his carriage, which hits a tree, and he is injured. His injuries are worsened when it turns out that his companion is not Claude, but the real bleeding nun, who haunts him relentlessly. Luckily, the Bashaw (the Wandering Jew) knows how to exorcise her. Meanwhile, Claude has been forced to become a nun. Regardless, Don Almagro pursues her, they continue their affair, and Don Almagro requests a Papal Bull to free her. The situation worsens when Don Almagro finds a letter from Claude: she is with child, and fears she will be lost if he cannot rescue her from the tyrannical prioress. Faced with the papal bull, the prioress lies, claiming Claude is dead. Don Almagro doesn't believe this, and sends his page in disguise to infiltrate the convent, where St. Urbana, spots him. As it turns out, St. Urbana witnessed the prioress poisoning Claude. After this is revealed in the public square, a mob storms the convent, and Claude's brother Olphos storms into the cellars, wherein he finds Claude, emaciated but still alive, chained in the dark. Finally, she is reunited with Don Almagro and they can be together without impediment. The story then turns its attention to Father Clement, who is a licentious monk; it was he who got Claude in trouble with the prioress by revealing her plans to escape. Since he was wicked and in league with a devil-worshipper, he is condemned to death.

Constellation of Knowledge/Historical Context

Almagro & Claude is one of many chapbooks built using pieces of Matthew Lewis' *The Monk*. The characters have direct analogues:

Monk -

Don Raymond/Marquis De Las Cisternas
Lorenzo
Ambrosio
Agnes
Marguerite

Almagro & Claude -

Don Almagro/Marquis d'Axala
Olphos
Clement
Claude
Antonia

Almagro and Claude can be viewed as part of a larger movement. Four of the nineteen gothic chapbooks that Dugdale and Tegg published are anonymous and clearly anti-Catholic productions: *Almagro & Claude; or the Monastic Murder*, *Father Innocent*, *The Secret Tribunal; or, The Court of Wincelaus*, and *Phantasmagoria, or the Development of Magical Deception*, and most of them conform to the pattern described by Loeber and Loeber in that they 'were illustrated with a frontispiece representing a terrifying or crucial scene from the narrative', while they promulgate a 'discourse which associates monstrosity, Catholicism, and sublimity [for] the Irish Anglicans attempting to come to terms with the "enemy" in their midst'. They are all, in fact, virtual miniature plagiarisms of their source texts, *The Monk* for *Almagro & Claude* and *Father Innocent*.

The two gothic chapbooks based on *The Monk – Almagro & Claude* and *Father Innocent* are both hyperbolic texts full of events that feature elaborate costuming, excess, and the sort of displays of clerical corruption and wealth that the Methodist mentality would have found deeply disturbing and offensive. As Cooney has shown, the Irish Methodists recruited their membership from the Church of Ireland and nonconformists, people who were artisans and 'upwardly aspiring commercial classes', particularly characterized by their industry, thrift, and hard work. Such a description accurately characterizes Bennett Dugdale, who converted to Methodism after hearing John Wesley preach in Dublin during his fourteenth visit to the city in 1773. Before long, Dugdale was a 'prominent member' of the Primitive Wesleyan Methodist Society, frequently preaching at the Methodist chapel and spearheading the drive to raise funds in order to build a new and large assembly hall for the Methodists. As a publisher we know that he was particularly interested in producing anti-slavery tracts, Methodist hymnals, and religious pamphlets, in addition to these five anti-Catholic gothic chapbooks. In short, he was not simply a 'pious publisher' as Cooney states, or just an ambitious Dublin-based collaborator of Thomas Tegg, as Loeber and Loeber suggest. He was also a Methodist propagandist who used his publishing firm to produce the sort of works that he and his associates thought would best advance the cause of Methodism in Ireland. To extrapolate from that conclusion, we might very well conclude that many of the publishing houses in Dublin during this period had unspoken but very clear political and religious agendas that can be discerned by a careful reading of their publication lists.

Key Words

Anti-Catholic

Since it is an imitation of *The Monk*, perhaps it is inevitable that *Almagro & Claude* is rife with Anti-Catholic sentiment. The main dangers for the heroine of this story are being forced into a convent, being betrayed by a monk, and being tortured and nearly killed by an abbess. Corruption within the Catholic hierarchy means not even a papal bull can free her, and no amount of prayer and good behavior will sway her Catholic captors to release her.

Apparition

Perhaps the most famous ghost in the gothic appears in *Almagro & Claude*. The bleeding nun is a long-dead relative of Don Almagro's who cannot rest until she is buried in her proper place. She is cursed to haunt the castle carrying a bloody dagger and a lantern until her relative can discover the true story of her death, and return her bones to her home. Her story very closely echoes the Bleeding Nun narrative from Volume II, Chapter I of *The Monk*, which Lewis credited to Musaus' *Volksmarchen der Deutschen* in a letter to Sir Walter Scott. The Bleeding Nun was such a popular character that she transcended her original role to appear in different contexts in many other mediums, including burlesques, operas, dramatic plays, toys, and toy theatre sets.

Banditti

The banditti live outside the law, and prey upon lawful citizens. In both *The Monk* and *Almagro & Claude*, the banditti have French names, suggesting an anti-French theme in the narrative. Indeed, the events surrounding the French Revolution made many people think the French were lawless and uncivilized compared with quiet dutifulness expected of the good Englishman.

Blood

Blood in the gothic has many different connotations, but in this case, it is a bizarrely gothic communication tool. Antonia wants to warn Don Almagro of the danger he faces, so she leaves the bloody sheets from the last victim on his bed. When he sees the blood, Don Almagro is on his guard, and knows he is the target of a murderous plot. It would be difficult to miss the poetry of this moment, since blood is so often evidence of a crime after the fact, and here it is being used to predict one that has not yet happened.

Castle

The castle of Wildenheim is typically gothic in that it is haunted, it is the former scene of foul play, and it is being used to imprison Claude.

Entrapment

The notion of entrapment is a prevalent motif in gothic literature. In *Almagro & Claude*, poor Claude is first entrapped in the castle, where she is held until she can be delivered to the convent, then entrapped in the crypts below the convent as a punishment for her attempt to escape.

Forced Vows

Just as serious as any monster of the gothic, the threat of being made to take vows against one's will is a recurring motif. In *Almagro and Claude*, the only threat to Claude's happiness at the beginning of her tale is that she will be forced to take vows to become a nun, and in attempted to evade these vows, she runs into many other problems. The idea of forcing someone to take a monastic vow is closely related to the forced confession of the inquisition and a forced marriage, in that it threatens the very sanctity of every promise ever made.

Genealogy

Part of the problem of the bleeding nun is that her relatives are unaware of her state. She was the great-aunt of Don Almagro's grandfather, and has long been forgotten. After her murder, her bones are discarded in a cavern, and no one from her family properly tracks her down. In this manner, the gothic explores the meaning of one's ancestors, and suggests that members of the family line are important, no matter how murderous or murdered they might be.

Intertextuality

Almagro & Claude is closely related to *Father Innocent*, since both are extracted from *The Monk*. *The Monk* itself is also a highly intertextual book, since Lewis borrowed heavily from many French and German sources.

Love

Don Almagro's love for Claude has the same irritatingly platonic quality as many hero/heroine pairs in the gothic. Somehow they fall in love with very little contact, rising above even the conventional notions of the time. Love does, however, function in *Almagro & Claude* as the primary driver for a large portion of the plot, leading Claude into grave danger.

Melancholy

Almagro's illness in *Almagro & Claude* is exacerbated by his belief that Claude is dead, and he cannot recover until she comes to his side. Although the word melancholy is not used, once she hears of Almagro's woeful state, Claude "secretly exulted in the cause of his illness, since it proved the strength of his affection."

Monk

Father Clement, whose story is tagged on to the end of *Almagro & Claude* is based on Father Ambrosio, the main character of *The Monk*. His temptation by a female disguised as a novice, his betrayal of Claude, his descent to rape, witchcraft, and murder are all drawn from the main plot of *The Monk*.

Motherhood

Motherhood in the Gothic is rarely a beneficial attribute. The typical Gothic mother is missing or dead. Pregnant women in the Gothic (like Claude) are imprisoned, and their babies are taken away or killed. Babies are left on doorsteps, mothers die attempting to

protect their teenaged daughters, and reveal terrible secrets on their deathbeds. The typical Gothic heroine's true parentage is unknown. At best, the Gothic is suspicious of the nature of the maternal bond.

Secrets

It is a common trope in the gothic for a character to travel under an assumed name, or to adopt a secret identity which is later revealed as part of the plot. It is therefore, unsurprising that D'Axala travels incognito in this story, although in *The Monk* Don Raymond's true identity becomes important only in another part of the novel, when he discovers a long-lost relative he can protect. This relationship is not present in the chapbook.

Wicked Abbess

It is difficult to say who is more evil, the monk Clement or the abbess in *Almagro and Claude*. She, too, is a carry-over from *The Monk*. It is her decision to chain Claude in a crypt to await death while lying to her family claiming she is already dead. The Abbess also defies the Pope's authority, and draws several other nuns into her scheme. No clear motives for her actions are given, which leads the reader back to the Anti-Catholic theme in the text.

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