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## Oakcliffe Hall [supplemental material]

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# Oakcliffe Hall, by an unknown author.

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### MLA Citation

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Wilkinson, Sarah Scudgell. *Oakcliffe Hall or the Fatal Effects of Feudal Quarrels. A Tale of the Fifteenth Century*. Published c. 1805. E-Publications Marquette. The Gothic Archive, Marquette University, Wisconsin. [http://epublications.marquette.edu/english\\_gothic/15/](http://epublications.marquette.edu/english_gothic/15/) Accessed 9/29/13. Web.

### Full Title

*Oakcliffe Hall or the Fatal Effects of Feudal Quarrels. A Tale of the Fifteenth Century.*

### Summary

Oakcliffe Hall is the home of the Lord and Lady Bellonmore and their children, Walter and Ellinor. The family is happy and generous to all until King Henry VIII marries Anne Boleyn, and the Lord and Lady are called to court to acknowledge the new Queen. They spend six weeks at court, and during their visit they present their son Walter, now twenty years old,

to the monarch. Upon returning home, however, the family is surprised to find that Ellinor has not fared well in their absence. Her caregivers, chaplain Lemuel Percy and governess Allicia are unable to explain the cause of her paleness and sadness, but can only recall that it began two weeks after her parents had left for court. For many weeks, her parents and her brother Walter attempt to ascertain the secret source of Ellinor's distress, but she is unwilling to reveal the cause of her decline. Eventually, Lady Bellonmore notices that Ellinor sneaks out of the house each morning to meet a young gentleman, who does not appear to be her brother. Upon the Lady's request, a servingwoman follows Ellinor to the secret meeting place (a grotto) the next morning, and discovers that Ellinor's rendezvous is with Lord Arthur, son of the Duke of Belgrave. Unfortunately for Arthur and Ellinor, the houses of Belgrave and Bellonmore have been feuding, and Lady Bellonmore is terrified that if her husband or son were to learn of Arthur's courtship, the feud could escalate into violence. She confronts Ellinor with her knowledge of Arthur's courtship, and forces Ellinor to swear a holy oath never again to see him.

A short time later, on her deathbed, Lady Bellonmore reminds Ellinor to uphold her vow, threatening to return from death to haunt her daughter if the vow is broken. Distraught, Arthur swears he can never love another woman, and begins to work on a plot to see Ellinor again. He infiltrates Oakcliffe Hall's chapel and spies on her as she is praying, then makes a sound that startles her to shrieking in terror. As she tries to flee, she doesn't recognize Arthur in the dark, and faints. Arthur takes this opportunity to abduct her, hiding the unconscious Ellinor in the grotto, returning with horses and his henchman Arnold to flee the area and wed Ellinor. Upon awakening, Ellinor cries out for help and tries to escape. Her brother Walter arrives just in time and draws his sword in her defense. At the end of the sword fight, Arthur and Walter are both mortally wounded, and Walter's death causes Lord Bellonmore to die of grief. Ellinor, the sole survivor, joins a nunnery and eventually becomes an Abbess. Before departing for the nunnery, Ellinor reads her parents' papers and discovers the origins of her family's feud with the Belgraves. Arthur's father had disguised himself to seduce Lord Bellonmore's sister Angeline. Angeline died in childbirth as a result of that ill-fated union, and her baby Ellinor was raised by Lady Bellonmore as her own. Ellinor then realizes that by feuding, the families were attempting to prevent her from unwittingly committing an act of incest with Arthur, who turns out to be her own half-brother.

## Constellation of Knowledge/Historical Context

**Note on the Title:** This work has also been published as *Arthur and Ellinor; or, the Fatal Effects of Feudal Quarrels: A Romance*.

## Key Words

### Dislocation

“Dislocation” is the destabilizing effect caused by fundamentally unstable and cryptic gothic narratives in its fragmentary epistolary forms. The avoidance of a neat arranging of elements and reassuring endings in gothic narratives leads to the desired dislocation of perspectives and ultimately the disturbance of a smooth reading experience as perhaps part of gothic narrative’s agenda to challenge assumptions of normalcy in the linear narration and neat resolution of social realist novels. At the end of Oakcliffe Hall, Ellinor opens her parents’ papers and discovers the origins of the feud between her family and Arthur’s. Only at this point is Ellinor’s true identity revealed. The author chooses to present this explanation at the end of the chapbook, and provides no other hints to the causes of the feud prior to the reading of the papers.

Source: Belinda Loh Mei "Gothic Keywords." <http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/ellgohbh/gothickeywords.html>. Last Updated 2006. Last Accessed 12/1/2013. Web.

### Forced Vow

The nature of vows is often called into question in the gothic. Can a vow be true if it is coerced, or not given freely? Is a written vow more or less trustworthy than a verbal vow? In this case, Ellinor’s mother forces her to swear a vow never to see Arthur again; a vow which is not in Ellinor’s power to uphold.

### Intertextuality

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. The ending of Oakcliffe Hall includes a poem, credited by Wilkinson to “an eminent poet of the present day.” The forbidden romance of two young members of noble feuding households could be an allusion to Romeo and Juliet and/or Pyramus and Thisbe; but any connection with these works is quickly severed when Arthur decides to abduct Ellinor against her will.

Source: Magdalene Poh "Gothic Keywords." <http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/ellgohbh/gothickeywords.html>. Last Updated 2006. Last Accessed 12/1/2013. Web.

### Madness

The motif of madness runs through many Gothic novels, and is often articulated by the characters themselves. Characters question their own sanity, or the sanity of other characters. Madness is also often portrayed as a hereditary disease, insidiously affecting a character’s psychological and mental health without him/her realizing it. Oftentimes, the strain of madness in a character in such novels is not obvious, nor overtly stated. The authors merely present the characters’ actions, often of uncontrollable passions, and extreme irrationality, in order to illustrate the mental ills of a character. Wilkinson’s use of madness in Oakcliffe Hall is intriguing; when Arthur and Arnold are attempting to abduct Ellinor, they explain to the people nearby that she ‘laboured under a mental derangement’.

Accepting this explanation, the locals do not come to Ellinor's aid, even when she is screaming and running down the road to try to escape.

Source: Belinda He "Gothic Keywords." <http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/ellgohbh/gothickeywords.html>. Last Updated 2006. Last Accessed 12/1/2013. Web.

### Missing Mother

The typical gothic mother is absent or dead. The typical gothic mother has to be killed in order for the domestic instability that underpins the gothic text to flourish. The repression of the mother allows the progression of the narrative in the gothic mode. 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. In *Oakcliffe Hall*, Ellinor loses two mothers. The first, Angeline, died giving birth to Ellinor. She is the classic gothic missing mother; the instability in both the Belgrave and Bellonmore families stems from Duke Belgrave's seduction and impregnation of Angeline. The second missing mother is Lady Bellonmore, the only mother Ellinor knows, whose death marks the beginning of her family's demise.

Source: Choo Li Lin "Gothic Keywords." <http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/ellgohbh/gothickeywords.html>. Last Updated 2006. Last Accessed 12/1/2013. Web.

### Secret/Revealed Genealogies

Often in the gothic a character will have hidden origins; for example, in MG Lewis' *The Monk*, Ambrosio does not find out that Elvira was his mother and Antonia was his sister until after he has murdered them both. In *The Secret Tribunal*, Mira is kept apart from Lipstolf because of the secret of her parentage. In *Oakcliffe Hall*, Ellinor doesn't know who her mother is, or that Arthur is her half-brother until she reads her family papers after their death.

### 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. For a relatively short text, *Oakcliffe Hall* includes many secrets. The Bellonmore family is presented as an idyllic one during the introductory pages, but the Lord and Lady are secretly not Ellinor's parents. The Lady Bellonmore proceeds to court to be introduced to Queen Anne, and must conceal her loyalty to Queen Katherine and disenchantment with the methods used to replace her. When the Bellonmores return home from court, Ellinor keeps the cause of her distress a secret, and when the Lady Bellonmore discovers the affair, she keeps it secret from the men of the family to avoid any retribution they might be tempted to exact. Arthur decides to elope with Ellinor in secret, and Ellinor's brother

Walter's identity as her rescuer is a secret until the moment he draws his sword. The foundations of the feud between the two families remains a secret until after everyone else has died, and Ellinor finds them in her parents' papers.

Source: Kong Yuqi "Gothic Keywords." <http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/ellgohbh/gothickeywords.html>. Last Updated 2006. Last Accessed 12/1/2013. Web.

## Bibliography of Related Information

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<[http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/encap/journals/corvey/articles/cc09\\_n03.html](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/encap/journals/corvey/articles/cc09_n03.html)>

Wilkinson, Sarah Scudgell. Oakcliffe Hall or the Fatal Effects of Feudal Quarrels. A Tale of the Fifteenth Century. London: William Cole, c. 1820-1830 (Copy of this edition in the Bodleian Library)