



Gothic and Grotesque in James Hogg's *The Mysterious Bride*

Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya

Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

Kamelia Talebian Sedehi

Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

Tay Lai Kit

Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

Received: 07-11-2016

Accepted: 29-12-2016

Published: 31-01-2017

doi:10.7575/aiac.ijclts.v.5n.1p.27

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijclts.v.5n.1p.27>

Abstract

The word Gothic refers back to the Dark ages in England. The Roman civilization was ruined by the Goths who were the barbarians at that time. As a result of the destruction of Roman Empire, the whole civilization underwent ignorance and darkness. Nowadays, the word Gothic has a variety of meaning and applications. Gothic novels portray exaggerated scenes, haunted castles, monsters and vampires. Scottish Gothic literature started after 1800. This paper will focus on one of the Scottish short stories by James Hogg, "The Mysterious Bride". Some elements of Gothic and grotesque such as transgression of boundaries, suspense, uncanny and supernatural being are discussed within this short story in order to indicate Hogg's main intention to use Gothic and grotesque elements in "The Mysterious Bride". Among all the elements in Gothic and grotesque, this paper will mainly apply the presence of the opposites, uncanny, abnormal beings and supernatural events to James Hogg's "The Mysterious Bride".

Keywords: Gothic, Grotesque, Supernatural Being, Suspense, Transgression of Boundaries, Uncanny

1. Introduction

Scottish Gothic literature started after 1800 when Sir Walter Scott coalesced Scottish and English traditions in his works and as Hogle asserts "Scott's novel thus participates directly in the history of Scottish national self- conception" (109). However, before Scott, other works such as Smollett's *the Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom* provides villain and other Gothic elements. Thematically speaking, Scottish Gothic focuses on the association between the nation and uncanny or supernatural. They focus on the way ancestral identity is alienated from modern life. James Hogg is one of the Scottish Gothic writers. He was called "the Ettrick Shepherd," a peasant- poet vitally connected with Border oral traditions" (Duncan 5). First, he followed Sir Walter Scott's footsteps, and then he found his own voice and style. His short fictions deal mostly with supernatural elements.

In addition to Gothic, the grotesque is also a point of interest in this paper. "Early usages of the word grotesque in English are restricted to the antique paintings and to the imitations of this style which became popular in the sixteenth century, particularly in Italy" (Thomson 13). However, in England, the grotesque entered literature in eighteenth century. Quinn mentions that the grotesque is a mix of laughter and horror and the "abnormal or macabre characters and incidents" (187). As Endurance et al., note "the word grotesque was not originally known as such, but was known by a Latin word called "grotto" which originated from Greek krypte "hidden place", meaning a small cave or hollow" (42). In this paper we are highlighting both the Gothic and the grotesque elements in Hogg's short story "The Mysterious Bride".

2. The Gothic and the Grotesque

The word Gothic refers back to the 'Dark ages in England. "History relates that the Goths were the barbarians who destroyed classical Roman civilization and plunged the civilized world into centuries of ignorance and darkness" (Ellis 22). Nowadays, the word Gothic has a variety of meaning and applications. Mostly the works between the 1760s and 1820s are considered as Gothic in literature.

This cultivation of a Gothic style was given new impetus in the mid- eighteenth century with the emergence of Enlightenment beliefs that extolled the virtues of rationality. Such ideas were challenged in Britain by the Romantics at the end of the eighteenth century, who argued that the complexity of human experience could not be explained by an inhuman rationalism (Smith 2).

The Gothic stories have some elements such as the haunted castles, terrified heroines, villains, ghosts, vampires, monsters and werewolves. Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis and Mary Shelley are considered as masters of Gothic genre. Besides the English Gothic, there exists new American Gothic which deals with psychological obsessions, rape, violence and breakdown. The main writers of this new American Gothic are James Purdy, Joyce Carol Oates, John Hawkes and Flannery O'Connor. Sometimes the word Gothic refers to horror fiction in which a ghost

dominates the whole story. The master writers of this supernatural fiction are Algernon Blackwood, M.R. James and H.P. Lovecraft. Generally speaking, the Gothic novels represent uncivilized, wild, and exaggerated scenes.

They focus on the way ancestral identity is alienated from modern life. James Hogg is one of the Scottish Gothic writers. He was called "the Ettrick Shepherd," a peasant-poet vitally connected with Border oral traditions" (Duncan 5). First, he followed Sir Walter Scott's footsteps, and then he found his own voice and style. His short fictions deal mostly with supernatural elements.

Some of Hogg's tales ('Tibby Hyslop's Dream,' 'The Mysterious Bride,' 'The Cameronian Preacher's Tale') rehearse a providential intervention of supernatural agents to rectify an earthly injustice or rebuke sinners or scoffers. (Duncan 6)

Later on, many writers imitated Hogg's style, among them one can name Tennant's rewritings, *The Bad Sister* and *Two women of Londo* (Germana 7).

The word grotesque thus comes to be applied in a more general fashion during the Age of Reason- and of Neo-Classicism- when the characteristics of the grotesque style of art- extravagance, fantasy, individual taste, and the rejection of 'the natural conditions of organization' – are the object of ridicule and disapproval. The more general sense...which it has developed by the early eighteenth century is therefore that of 'ridiculous, distorted, unnatural'; 'an absurdity, a distortion of nature'. (Clayborough 6)

It can be interesting to perceive that the fascination with the grotesque led to neo-classical period (Barasch 129). As Jafni *et al.* discussed one can notice grotesque in most of the horror stories (55). The selected short story is considered as horror as it has supernatural elements. This article intends to focus on the elements of the Gothic and the grotesque in James Hogg's "The Mysterious Bride".

3. James Hogg's *The Mysterious Bride* and the concepts of Gothic and Grotesque

"The Mysterious Bride" is a ghost story in which the ghost appears to take revenge on a family and lead it to extinction. As the story opens, the narrator foreshadows the appearance of a ghost to Laird of Birkendely. He explains the way some people believe or do not believe in ghosts.

As Laird walks in the street, a charming woman catches his eyes and he is surprised "where the deuce can she has sprung from? She must have risen out of the earth, for I never saw her till this breath" (Hogg 62-63). This is an abnormal event as he believes that the girl has risen out of the earth. The girl's abnormal and sudden appearance and disappearance is considered as grotesque and it evokes suspense. Moreover, Corey believes that

The grotesque breaks the boundaries of normalcy in some way and always points toward the mysterious and inexplicable. Confronted with the abnormal in the midst of the normal, the reader is stimulated to find new meaning (1997, 20).

The sudden appearance of this girl is interesting and surprising to Laird. As he follows the girl, she suddenly disappears, but he is sure that he can find her as there is no way out. To his astonishment, he cannot find her anywhere. The atmosphere of Gothic stories is gloomy and mysterious the same atmosphere is presented in this story (Botting 1996, 1).

As he looks around himself, he meets his friend and perceives that his friend did not meet any girl with the appearance he describes. "I met no young lady, nor is there a single person on the road I have come by, while you know that for a mile and a half forward your way, she could not get out of it" (Hogg 64). The story about this mysterious girl is interesting for Laird's friend as he saw no one for a mile and no one can escape the road. This event is very mysterious for both men. They talk together and suddenly the girl reappears. They follow her, but "the maiden was not there!... no human creature in view" (Hogg 66). This event is terrifying and abnormal as human beings cannot appear and disappear out of nowhere. The emphasis on 'no human creature' conveys the sense of suspense in reader's mind. He wishes to see this girl again "whether a being of earth, heaven, or hell" (Hogg 70). As Meindl notices "categorical transgression" as one of the elements of grotesque "comingles the animate and inanimate and conflates such classification as plant, animal, human" (15).

As the story sails through, the reader perceives that Laird sees the girl once more, but she disappears as he approaches her and it is a strange event and Laird is frightened by the repetition of the same event for the second, third, and more times. The story becomes increasingly more mysterious and the reader suspects the later events as Laird's friend informs him about a man who is haunted by an officer in red and he gets rid of this apparition by the help of a doctor. However, Laird does not pay attention to these words as he believes that apparition was imaginary but this young girl is real. From this claim the opposites arise in this story and the reader gets confused by the thought of this strange girl. The reader dangles between reality and imaginary nature of this girl.

Much later in the story, Laird decides to travel to Ireland in order to visit her sister and his sister's relatives. As he walks in the streets of Ireland, he thinks that he sees a similar girl. When he pays more attention he perceives that she is the same girl that he met in his country. "She was a being of real flesh and blood" (Hogg 75). The inanimate being which appears and disappears in a flash, which is strange, turned into animate being and stops to talk to him and here the identity is blur. No one is really sure of her true nature. He is informed that they were engaged before he was born and he agreed to marry her in next three years on St. Lawrence's eve.

The girl demands Laird to look around himself and he perceives that he is no longer in Ireland, but he is "on the Birky Brow, on the only spot where he had ever seen her" (Hogg 75). This event adds to the abnormality of events as he left

his country and went to Ireland, but the trip seemed to be unreal as he is in his country. The boundaries of reality and imaginary shatter throughout the story and neither Laird nor the reader is not sure about the existence of such events.

As the boundaries of imaginary and real being shattered before, the boundaries of reality and dream are mingled once more as "in attempting to call for a boat, he awoke from a profound sleep, and found himself lying in his bed within his sister's house, and the day sky just breaking" (Hogg 77); as Botting claims the Gothic stories challenge the boundaries of reason and fanciful (1996, 6). Laird is not certain of girl's true nature and transgression of boundaries adds to doubt and uncertainty in this story and conveys the feeling of horror to the reader.

Laird and his beloved pass betrothal ring, but when Laird shows this ring to his sister, she mentions that this is not a ring that a Christian wears. This comment on the ring adds to suspicious atmosphere of the story and the reader is eager to know about the reason why this ring is not suitable for a Christian. Laird's mother's nurse's reaction is worse than her sister's. When she looks at the ring,

She threw up her arms with a jerk, opened her skinny jaws with a fearful gape, and uttering a shriek, that made all the house yell, and everyone within it to tremble, she fell back lifeless and rigid on the floor (Hogg 78-79).

This is an uncanny event as it portrays the opened skinny jaw, shriek and then the horrible dead body. The images and descriptions evoke horror and terror. "For Freud the uncanny, or *unheimlich*, exists in opposition to the *heimlich*, or 'homely'. The *unheimlich* 'is undoubtedly related to what is frightening- to what arouses dread and horror', whereas *heimlich* refers to domesticity and security" (Smith 13). In fact, the Gothic expresses the uncanny, disorder and alienness (Botting 2001, 8). The uncanny, according to Freud,

Undoubtedly belongs to all that is terrible- to all that arouses dread and creeping horror; it is equally certain, too, that the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with whatever excites dread (Freud 217).

These reactions attract the reader's attention to the rest of the story as the reader becomes eager to perceive the reason behind all these over- reactions. The detailed description which is horrible is grotesque as Moghadam and Termizi note that violent, transgressive and bizarre depiction of events can be considered as grotesque (134). The shriek, scream and skinny jaws are all strange images that add to the horror of the story.

As Barasch notices, the grotesque is "an aesthetic category, a specific genre, a particular style, a form, a repulsive image, and an indeterminable world" (164). Although Laird's family and relatives attempted to persuade him not to marry the girl, on the eve of St. Lawrence, they marry each other. After some days passed and people observed these two together, Laird's horse and he are found dead:

When Bikendelly's fine bay horse was found lying dead at his own stable door; and shortly after, his master was likewise discovered lying a blackened corpse on the Birky Brow, at the very spot where the mysteries, but lovely dame, had always appeared to him (Hogg 82).

One can conclude that this specific spot is important for this girl as all the events take place on the Birkey Brow. The interesting information is that Laird's body was not injured, but it turned into black and it adds to the previous mysteries; now the reader is willing to know the way the girl killed Laird, which has such consequence, is mysterious this time.

One day, a woman arrived at Laird's village and informed people of Laird's ancestors. People recognized that Laird's grandfather got married to Jane and treated her very inhumanly. Either he killed her or gave its order to someone else is not clear, but this girl intends to take revenge on the entire family. First she killed grandfather, the father and now it was Laird's turn as there is no son in the family, the family is extinct.

As the ghost comes to take revenge, one considers it as a devilish ghost. Therefore the allusion to eve of St. Lawrence becomes meaningful at the end of the story and adds to previous binary opposites. Here the devilish and angelic characters are opposites. In fact, Saint Lawrence is famous for helping the poor people. When Pope Saint Sixtus was condemned to death, Saint Lawrence was heartrending, but pope informs him that they will meet each other in three days. As the Perfect of Rome was a greedy pagan and just thinks about the money and believes that the church had great treasure, he ordered Saint Lawrence to bring him the treasure. In three days, Saint Lawrence brings the poor and sick people and informs the Perfect that these people are the treasure. The perfect gets mad at him and gives the order of his execution. They prepared a fire and roasted his flesh over it. Pope's prediction comes true and they met each other in three days. The allusion refers back to religious people; however, this story provides the opposite case. Laird's sister warns him that the betrothal ring is not appropriate for a Christian. Moreover, the reader perceives that the girl is a revengeful ghost who comes to take revenge on Laird. As Laird is fascinated by this devilish ghost and they join each other in three years; the main opposite which is angelic and devilish people arise from the story. That is the main reason why the sister claims that the ring is not suitable for a Christian as it was offered by a devilish being. Besides, number three indicates union and in Saints' case, the angelic people join each other, on the other hand, in Laird's case, the devilish people unite. Not only the girl but also Laird has devilish characteristics as he is attracted to devilish ghost and lost his life for the sake of his demonic nature.

4. Conclusion

The presence of the opposites, uncanny, abnormal beings and supernatural events which are the elements of the Gothic and grotesque stories convey the message that "the wicked people of the great muckle village have got a lesson on Divine justice written to them in lines of blood" (Hogg 86). This mysterious story has a moral lesson and gives advice

to people to be careful about their deeds and behavior toward other people and treat them like a human being rather than an animal. It provokes fear to indicate the consequences of cruelty toward people.

References

- Barasch, F. K. (1971). *The Grotesque: A Study in Meanings*. Amsterdam: Walter De Gruyter.
- Botting, F. (1996). *Gothic*. London: Routledge.
- Botting, F. (2001). *Essays and studies 2001 the gothic*. London: St Edmundbury Press.
- Clayborough, A. (1967). *The Grotesque in English literature*. Gloucestershire: Clarendon Press.
- Corey, S. (1997). *The Religious dimensions of the grotesque: Toni Morrison's Beloved*. In James Luther Adams and Wilson Yates. *The Grotesque in Art and Literature: Theological Reflections*.
- Duncan, I. (2012) Walter Scott, James Hogg, and Scottish Gothic, in *A New Companion to the Gothic* (ed D. Punter), Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Ellis, M. (2000). *The History of gothic fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Endurance, A, Wan Yahya, W. R, and Majeed, A. A. (2014). *The Grotesque Elements in Poe's "Black Cat" and Scudder's "The White Cat"*. *International Journal of Comparative Literature & Translation Studies* 2 (2): 42-46.
- Freud, S. (1919). *The 'Uncanny'*. The Standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, volume XVII (1917- 1919): infantile neurosis and other works, 217- 256.
- Germana, M. (2010). *Scottish women's gothic and fantastic writing: fiction since 1978*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Gowans, A. L. (1911) *The Twelve best tales by English writers*. New York: Thomas Y Crowell Company Publishers.
- Hogle, J, E. (2002). *The Cambridge companion to gothic fiction (Cambridge companions to literature)*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Jafni, N. F. S. A., Wan Yahya, W. R., and Kaur, H. (2016). *Facilitating The Grotesque Reception and Human Nature Interrelationship in Tunku Halim's Dark Demon Rising*. 3L: *The Southeast Asian Journal of English Studies*. 22 (1): 55-66.
- Meindl, D. (1996) *American fiction and the metaphysics of the grotesque*. New York: University of Missouri.
- Moghadam, N.S., and Termizi, A.A. (2013). *Grotesque Representations of Deviant Sexuality in Ian McEwan's Selected Short Stories*. *Pertanika Journals Social Sciences and Humanities* 21 (S): 131 – 142.
- Quinn, E. (2006). *Dictionary of Literary and Thematic Terms*. New York: Checkmark Books.
- Smith, A. (2007). *Gothic literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Thomson, Ph. (1967). *The Grotesque*. London: Methuen.