

ISSN 0976-8165

The Criterion



The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Bi-Monthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access eJournal

October 2013 Vol. 4 Issue-V

Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Vishwanath Bite

Managing Editor

Madhuri Bite

www.the-criterion.com
criterionejournal@gmail.com

Supernaturalism and Mysticism in Walter Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor*

Dr. Darsha Jani

Associate Professor

Head, Department of English

Municipal Arts & Urban Bank Science College, Mehsana

North Gujarat

The plot of Sir Walter Scott's illustrious work *The Bride of Lammermoor* is related to a real incident of life, which took place in the family of Dalrymple, an eminent lawyer and a person of great distinction. Miss Janet Dairymple was the daughter of the Lord Stair. She was engaged without the knowledge of her parents to Lord Rutherford, whom Janet's parents did not like. He was poor and had political leanings which were not approved by them. The young couple took a solemn pledge and the young lady from this day invited dreadful evils on herself in case she would break the promise or vow. She was taken by people as an expert in necromancy.

Soon after another suitor with the consent of the Lord and Lady Stair, offered his love to Janet. She did not accept the proposal and revealed her secret engagement to Lord Rutherford. Lady Stair, Janet's mother, ignored her stand and forced her to accept the new suitor. The first lover wanted that he should be married to Janet reminding her of her pledge. But Lady Stair sent him the reply that her daughter by then had realized her mistake in making a pledge for marrying him and now she had resolved not to marry him. Rutherford wanted an answer from Janet. Lady Stair allowed her daughter to meet Rutherford, but she was present when the two met. She also urged upon the innocent and disappointed lover that according to the Law, Janet's vow or pledge was of no significance when it did not have the consent of her parents. The mother was pleased in this manner, but the daughter more or less remained mute or dumb. She had turned pale and motionless. She returned to her plighted lover the piece of broken gold which was the emblem of her truth. The lover was fully broken at this and he went abroad never to return again.

The marriage of Janet and David Dunbar then was celebrated. On the day of their marriage she was sad, silent and resigned. She did not enjoy anything, not even the bridal feast and the dance which followed it. The bride and the bridegroom returned, as usual, to the nuptial chamber but all were surprised when piercing cries began to come from their chamber. The bride's men rushed towards the chamber on hearing the cries. They found the bridegroom lying dreadfully wounded and profusely bleeding on the floor. The bride was then traced. She was found in the corner of a large chimney. She sat there with a grin at them, mopping and mowing. She survived this horrible incident for about a fortnight. The bridegroom soon recovered from his wounds. But he would not answer any queries regarding this incident. He too could not live for long and died after receiving injuries due to horse –fall.

Scott has weaved this actual incident in his novel *The Bride* in an artistic and inventive manner. The bride is named Lucy Ashton and her lover is called Edgar, the Master of Ravenswood whose father's property has been usurped by Lucy's father Sir William Ashton who is an unscrupulous diplomat. Sir William Ashton's wife Lady Ashton belongs to a respectable family. She is exceedingly proud of her descent. She is an ill-tempered woman and acts almost as a tyrant in her house. Since Edgar is deprived of all his fortunes; he decides to take revenge upon the Lord Keeper, Sir William Ashton. But the story takes a turn when instead of killing his

enemy, Edgar saves the life of Sir William Ashton and his daughter Lucy. Edgar finds himself absolutely bowled over by the beautiful Lucy.

While the theme of love is dominant, the revenge theme is not overlooked. Lady Ashton tries to take revenge upon Edgar and creates conditions whereby to effect a union between Lucy and Bucklaw. Bucklaw is married to Lucy, and the marriage is followed by feasts and dances at the Ashton's. Lucy refuses to open the ball and her mother has to do it for her. After some time when the ball is still going on, Lucy calls the bride-groom who follows her. The mirthful and joyous atmosphere is disturbed when the guests assembled there hear a cry from the bridal chamber. They all rush up and open the doors of the room. To their utter surprise they find Bucklaw lying in a pool of blood. Lucy sitting in a corner of the room looks like a lunatic. She remains in a trance for a couple of days. When she comes back in her senses, she starts searching for the gold coin round her neck which had been removed from there by her mother. The Laird of Bucklaw recovers from his injury and leaves Scotland forever without telling anybody what happened that night. But Lucy fails to face the catastrophe and dies.

The Master of Ravenswood silently attends the funeral of Lucy. He is challenged by Lucy's brother who gives him the measurement of his sword and asks him to see him next morning at Wolf's hope. The Master selects a shorter sword in order to give advantage to his opponent, Colonel Ashton. Next morning, the Master takes leave of his servant Caleb Balderstone and gives him a heavy purse. But Caleb pays little attention to what is offered to him and runs fast to see what way his master took. He finds him going towards the Kelpie's flow. He sees the Master reach the fatal spot, but is unable to see anything more either of him or of his horse. The prophecy of Thomas, the Rhymer is fulfilled and the name of the Master of Ravenswood is lost forever. Caleb is unable to bear the shock and dies very soon. Colonel Ashton also dies in a duel. Sir William Ashton outlives his son but dies before Lady Ashton, the only survivor in the entire family.

The novel is a tragedy, caused more by destiny than by character. The element of mysticism and eeriness reigns supreme in the novel. Both the hero and the heroine are victims of circumstances. The mysterious ways, omens and prophecies, determine the fate of the hero and the heroine. They are more powerful than any man or woman in the novel. The chance meeting of the Master with Lucy at the Mermaid Fountain, an ominous place, the falling of the dead raven at the feet of Lucy and the prophecy of Blind Alice are a warning to the action of the hero, but unmindful of these, he proceeds inexorably towards his fate or destined tragic end. By making the familiar seem unfamiliar, and the unfamiliar familiar, Scott does in the novel what Coleridge did in his ballad *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. The supernatural is presented not as a dogma but as a part of the national superstitions of Scotland. Scott throws a certain colouring of imagination over everything that he gets from life, and presents them in such a way that the improbable seem probable.

The Bride of Lammermoor brings out the atmosphere of awe, mystery, loneliness, melancholy, terror and horror. The most conspicuously Gothic feature of the novel is Wolf's Crag, Ravenswood's gloomy fortress overlooking the North Sea. It reminds the reader that the Ravenswoods were once giants in the land and that their power is now just a memory. And Ravenswood Castle, now in the possession of the Master's enemy, who has usurped his castle, is also depicted with all the gloomy features. The constituent of mysticism dominates the novel and is related to a chronicle of hatred, tyranny, and crime.

There are instances where Scott has invested the apparently coincidental occurrences with a mysterious significance. While touring his new estate with his daughter Lucy, Sir William Ashton is attacked by a bull “stimulated either by the scarlet colour of Miss Ashton's mantle, or by one of those fits of capricious ferocity” (38) of wild animals in general. The cattle are specifically associated with the old owners. Scott comments that even though “they had degenerated from the ancient race in size and strength ... they retained, however, in some measure, the ferocity of their ancestry” (38). A parallel therefore could be drawn between the bulls and the Ravenswood family. When the bull attacks Ashton, it symbolically expresses the animosity of the ancient estate towards its bourgeois usurper. Edgar's shooting of the bull assumes the significance that he has abandoned his vow of vengeance to save his enemy and his enemy's daughter. His action appears to sacrifice the natural enmity that exists between the Ashtons and the Ravenswoods - an enmity which the bull's headlong attack indicates.

The natural events described in the novel are also indicative of actions of protagonists in future. The gloom of the weather on the day of Edgar's father's funeral reflects the state of Edgar's mind in strong contrast to the drunken bravado of his kinsmen during the wake. “It was a November morning, and the cliffs which overlooked the ocean were hung with thick and heavy mist, when the portals of the ancient and half-ruinous tower, in which Lord Ravenswood had spent the last and troubled years of his life, opened, that his mortal remains might pass forward to an abode yet more dreary and lonely(18).

The connection between nature and human action in the novel is observed most strongly when a storm hangs over Wolf's Crag during Ashton's visit to the tower. When Edgar kisses Lucy in greeting, “the apartment was suddenly illuminated by a flash of lightning, which seemed absolutely to swallow the darkness of the hall” (101). The effect of the moment on the castle is such that, “The soot, which had not been disturbed for centuries, showered down the huge tunnelled chimneys; lime and dust flew in clouds from the wall; and, whether the lightning had actually struck the castle or whether through the violent concussion of the air, several heavy stones were hurled from the mouldering battlements into the roaring sea beneath.” (101).

Scott asserts that it seemed “as if the ancient founder of the castle were bestriding the thunderstorm, and proclaiming his displeasure at the reconciliation of his descendant with the enemy of his house.” (101). When at the Mermaid fountain, Lucy takes a vow to marry the Master, her brother Henry Ashton shoots a raven that falls down bleeding at Lucy's feet, Lucy pursues her reflections, “It is decreed, that every living creature, even those who owe me most kindness, are to shun me, and leave me to those by whom I am beset”. (256)

In the novel, Scott has introduced ghosts, omens, premonitions and prophecies which emphasize the inevitable over which human beings do not possess any type of control. The predictions of Blind Alice about the suffering of the Master of Ravenswood and the fore-telling of Thomas, the Rhymer, who predicts Ravenswood's death in the Kelpie's flow and the forecast of the old hags about Lucy's death are all supernatural elements incorporated by Scott. They have a great resemblance with the magic and witchcraft used by Shakespeare in his plays *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar*. There is an undercurrent of sorcery; the old hags who comment on the action and the chief of them is Ailsie Gourlay who plays a part of destruction of Lucy's will

and sanity. Moreover, the dire prophecies in case of both Lucy and the Master of Ravenswood are fulfilled. The verse which Caleb Balderstone quotes to the Master “And his name shall be lost for evermore” anticipates exactly what happens in the end. All this creates an atmosphere which belongs to the Gothic novels popular in Scott's time. In “*The Bride*”, it is the dispossessed heir who dies, while the usurper Sir William Ashton continues to enjoy the estate. Scott seems to be more interested in the effect of superstition on the mind that entertains it rather than in the presentation of probable truth or otherwise of the legend.

Another character representing Gothic features is that of Blind Alice, an old woman who stays on the estate of Ravenswoods even after it has passed into the Ashtons' hands. She laments the decline of the former masters of Ravenswoods. She possesses genuine powers of prophecy, and she asserts that her acquaintance with occult has not caused her to forget that the fall of the Ravenswoods has been because of the sins of the Ashtons and their kinds, as representatives of a new Scotland without sympathy for the men and traditions of the past.

When the Blind Alice urges Edgar to avoid Lucy and her family, she thinks not only of the feud between Ravenswoods and Ashtons, but also of their opposing political and ideological views. But Edgar says, “You drive me to madness Alice, you are more silly and more superstitious than old Balderstone.” (167) At this, Alice replies that if her mortal sight is closed to objects present before her, it may be she can look with more steadiness into future events. She asks a very pertinent question to Edgar Ravenswood, “Can you say as Sir William Ashton says, think as he thinks, vote as he votes, and call your father's murderer your worshipful father-in-law and revered patron?” (167)

The chilling prophecy concerning the last laird of Ravenswood appears to be fulfilled. The Master here has been depicted by Scott as a prisoner of an ineluctable fate and so the tragedy has been determined in advance. Lucy and the Master appear to be caught in a web of circumstance, condemned to a destiny which they are unable to escape. They are surrounded by croaking voices in the form of Blind Alice, Ailsie Gourlay and others foretelling their determined fate. Yet the Master in reality is the victim of his own character and of political misfortunes, whereas Lucy is destroyed by her mother Lady Ashton's intensity of will rather than by ominous warnings. Scott shows a society where superstition is credible, but where the true destiny is character. The Lord Keeper's diffident and political empiricism along with Lady Ashton's selfish and obstinate will - belong absolutely to an everyday world which is familiar to the reader.

The tragic end is not merely predicted at the beginning, but in fact kept steadily before the eye by a series of signs and forecasts. The gloomy background mull over the spirit; the haunted fountain, the ancestral curse, the raven shot by her brother and staining Lucy's dress with its blood, and more horrible is the wrath of old Alice appearing to the Master at the hour of her death, and the grim mirth of the witch-women laying out the body and anticipating with horrible glee the imminent downfall of those now rejoicing in youth, wealth and power- are all the examples of murky romance. Moreover the three hags streaking and winding the corpse of Lucy in the churchyard, and gloating over the prospect of soon doing the same for himself, remind the Master of the three witches in *Macbeth*. It is evident that the realistic action of the novel is

juxtaposed with supernatural omens, legends and prophecies, all of which offer a superstitious explanation of events.

Works Cited:

Scott, Walter, *The Bride of Lammermoor*. London: Everyman, 2009.

Baker, E. A. *The History of the English Novel*, Vol. 6, New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1969.

Devlin, D. D. *Walter Scott*. ed., London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1968.

Legouis, Emile, and Louis Cazamian. *A History of English Literature*, Vol. 6, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927.