

Dark Light

-- Analysis of Gothic Factors in " The Daughter of Owls "

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Abstract

Gothic novels have a long history. This article starts with Neil Gaiman's short story "The Daughter of Owls" and interprets the terrifying charm of Gothic novels "The Daughter of Owls" from the perspectives of symbolic expression, foreshadowing, the author's time choice, environmental description, and the terrifying characteristics of the characters' hearts. The aim is to explore how the work creates a terrifying atmosphere and enable readers to experience the lingering horror, thereby generating a sense of sublime beauty, conducting moral exploration and self purification and thus generating a positive and upward personality power to resist evil.

Keywords

Gothic Style; Terror; Moral Exploration; Neil Gaiman.

1. Introduction

"The Daughter of Owls" is a story from the short story collection "Smoke and Mirrors", which is Neil Gaiman's first collection of short stories and includes 30 classic short stories (including the introduction of the wedding gift story). He is the British national treasure level novelist who uses his extraordinary imagination to turn ordinary and mundane worlds into wonders. Behind his imaginative imagination, there is a terrifying layout to unravel the dark side of human nature, allowing the plot and thoughts to constantly develop, always tightly grasping the reader's heart, and allowing a clear view of primitive human nature. Every story in "Smoke and Mirrors" is just a shadow of something, like smoke without substance. They are the messages conveyed in the mirror.

There is still a lack of research on "The Daughter of Owls", but the content of this story is still in line with the times, and the vulnerable female group is still worth paying attention to. The story combines Gothic style, making readers feel the beauty of terror, self purification, and moral exploration. This article attempts to study the novel collection from the perspective of Gothic factors. Firstly, this article will introduce the author and Gothic novels, and secondly, analyze the expression techniques of terror - symbols and foreshadowing. Finally, analyze the artistic presentation of horror from the perspectives of time, scene, and characters.

2. Neil Gaiman and Gothic Novels

In 1960, Neil Gaiman was born into a family of Jewish descent in Hampshire, England. Gaiman loved to immerse himself in the library since childhood. His first book he read was J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings," and he particularly enjoyed Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," as well as horror and science fiction novels: Works by H.P. Lovecraft, Edgar Allen Poe, Alan Moore, Roger Zelazny, and others. The Gothic factor is a common element in children's literature. Styles such as Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" and J.K. Rowling's "Harry Potter" are the same as Gothic. Gaiman himself mentioned in "The Art of Storytelling" that "the dark and terrifying part of the story of 'Caroline' is that he does not want

his child to be protected too well and away from all darkness. This way, when darkness comes, the child will lose the weapons he may use but could have fought against it." Alison Halsall pointed out that "The Graveyard Book " and its adaptations have a Gothic style, and it is concluded that Gaiman demonstrated his concern for children's development and psychological development through Gothic literature, and he changed his Gothic writing to make the cemetery a warm place to protect the protagonist's warm home [1].

Gothic novels are a type of horror or ghost novel, often set in dark places such as monasteries, medieval castles, and tunnels, depicting the plot of murder, violence, revenge, rape, incest, and occasional supernatural phenomena such as ghosts. The atmosphere is gloomy, terrifying, and full of suspense; A rare story that depicts persecution, murder, and other events caused by satisfying sexual desires or competing for property, shrouded in a mysterious and terrifying atmosphere, with eerie and tense plots. Gothic novels are committed to revealing the dark side of social evil and human nature, and conducting profound moral explorations[2]. In the 18th century, Gothic became the name of a new genre of novels. It originated from Horace Walpole's "The Castle of Otranto," with the subtitle "A Gothic Story" (1764), the first novel named "Gothic". The novel is destined to have a huge impact on horror novels[3]. "This novel is a story about the struggle for inheritance rights, mixed with mysteries of life, shocking ghosts and gods, and the persecution of weak and unfortunate girls. The establishment of Gothic novels as a literary genre dates back to the 1890s[4].

"The Daughter of Owls" reflects this Gothic style - abandoned monasteries, scheming violence, etc. The work reveals mysterious horror and sexual consciousness. When the daughter of an owl was first discovered, she was only an abandoned female infant holding the owl's saliva (also known as a meatball, a small lump of undigested food that carnivores accumulate in the digestive tract after eating, and then spit out pellets with fur, bones, etc.). The village elders suggested burning her because she was not born into humans, but was stopped by wise men. Subsequently, the baby girl was taken to the monastery where the village women took turns delivering meals to support her. When the girl grew up to fourteen years old, she became a stunning young girl. And the village people discussed going to "visit". The village men then went to the monastery on a full moon night to rape the little girl. That night, the village made a sound of flapping their wings, and the next day, the village men all evaporated from the human world, leaving only owl saliva on the floor of the monastery, It was mixed with hair, buttons, coins, and bone fragments. Later on, people vaguely saw a girl standing high at night.

3. The Horror of Expression Techniques

The author's expression techniques - symbolism and foreshadowing - contain multiple meanings. The owl is not only a symbol of wisdom but also a representative of death. The foreshadowing laid by the author at the beginning - the owl's saliva is also a reflection of ingenuity. Upon closer reading, a terrifying atmosphere strikes, which is worth savoring repeatedly.

3.1. The Symbol of an Owl

Firstly, there is the symbolic meaning of the owl, which is both a symbol of wisdom and death in the West. In Greek mythology, the main god Athena of Olympus had gray eyes like owls, and her wisdom was reflected from her eyes, making the owl a symbol of wisdom. As the saying goes: as wise as an owl. The owl in the fantasy work "Harry Potter" also acts as a clever messenger. Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" said that Yesterday at noon, the night owl perched in the market and made a mournful sound. This kind of strange omen appeared at the same time, and no one can say that these are not surprising natural phenomena. Afterwards, Caesar went to the Senate to be killed[5]. Scholars have also summarized the reasons for the ominous nature of owls, which are characterized by their love for night activities, their cries resembling

mourning, their ferocious smiles, their love for eating rotten mice, their love for living in graves, their cannibalism, and their association with death[6].

The villagers left the baby girl in a dilapidated monastery and in the "Devil's Land", where various owls build nests. They expected the baby girl to not live long, after all, it was a place surrounded by the God of Death, which indirectly reflects the terrifying nature of owls. Afterwards, the wise owl witnessed the men in the village doing evil in the middle of the night, saw their cruelty and shamelessness, and heavily punished these greedy people. The women in the village searched for everywhere but never saw their husband and son. They disappeared, leaving only the remains of the owl that contained the remains. According to the legendary cannibalism of owls, it can be inferred that all men in the village were eaten by owls. This also confirms that the owl is the wise god of death, and being associated with it is extremely dangerous.

Gaiman's narrative style belongs to the old Gothic narrative, with a clear boundary between good and evil. Even when evil is present, it is completely defeated and expelled by the hero or heroine who solves the problem[7]. In the novel, the owl of wisdom punishes evil and promotes good. Gothic novels are a special form of historical legend, a fantasy form about past history and foreign culture, which has meaning for modern readers through the reflection of cultural politics[8]. The owl serves as the embodiment of justice and wisdom, as well as the embodiment of the god of death, full of terror and vigilance. Readers are brought into the story and will take into account the characters' positions for reflection. If brought into the perspective of the victim, they will feel helpless and frightened, deeply feel the pain of the girl, develop empathy, and pay more attention to vulnerable female groups in real life. If we incorporate the perspective of the perpetrator and experience the fear of being eaten, as well as the fear of human evaporation and the regret of dying without leaving anything behind, the story will have a warning effect, warning not to harm life recklessly. The supernatural radiance reflected in the story has a certain impact on modern readers.

3.2. Fearful Foreshadowing

The definition of foreshadowing in "Cihai" is that foreshadowing is a descriptive narrative technique in literary creation, which refers to the effect of the author suggesting in advance about the upcoming person or thing, and ultimately causing a response. In the place of Dymton, there was a newborn girl who was left on the steps of the church entrance in the middle of the night. The next morning, the abbot discovered her holding a strange object - an owl's saliva. Gaiman left the foreshadowing of the owl's saliva at the beginning, and owls must eat certain types of animals, with fur, teeth, and bones. What exactly does an owl eat? Why is the baby girl holding an owl spit in her hand? What is her relationship with owls? When a series of questions arise, attentive readers continue to read with doubts, raise questions, and seek clues to solve the problems. This foreshadowing serves as the foundation for the story, and in the end, the village man mysteriously disappears after committing evil, leaving only saliva containing human belongings on the cellar slate. At this point, readers come to their own conclusion.

In the Western country, owls are carnivorous animals, and it is said that they also eat humans. Therefore, it is speculated that the owl punished the evil men, ate them, and left behind indigestible pellets the next day. Therefore, the foreshadowing in the front has rationalized the cannibal plot behind it, making the plot develop naturally and smoothly, and also making the entire plot more closely connected, echoing back and forth, attracting readers to ponder repeatedly, and thus marveling at the author's ability to plan and layout the story. As the French narrator Gerald Genette once said, the foreshadowing is in principle a small and imperceptible embryo in the text; its embryonic value can only be seen in later retrospect[9].

4. The Art Presentation of Gothic Style

Gaiman creates a terrifying atmosphere in terms of time, environment, and characters. I chose to present the dark night filled with a sense of uncertainty, the territory of demons, the dilapidated monastery, and the inner evil of the villagers.

4.1. Night

The imagery of the night runs through the entire text, and each appearance promotes the development of the plot. The image of the night has the function of enhancing the atmosphere, covering up evil and punishing evil behavior[10]. Gaiman also describes the time period favored by Gothic novels as "night".

Firstly, the baby girl was left at the church entrance in the middle of the night; So on the night of the full moon, the men pretended to go hunting together, so they sneaked out of their homes and met outside the monastery, which both emphasizes that time is night. Night often appears in Gothic novels, such as in science fiction where the protagonist of the same name creates a monster. It is also in "The Castle of Otranto" where the crazy Manfred accidentally kills his daughter in the cemetery at night. In his monograph, Lovecraft wrote that the most primitive and strongest fear of humanity comes from the fear of the unknown[11]. At night, humans cannot see the outside world clearly, so the outside world is filled with a sense of unknown, mystery, and terror. The girl baby was abandoned in the vast darkness, which made people feel terrifying.

The night is also related to darkness and the "black nature", making it prone to evil criminal behavior. In the darkness, people full of greed become bolder and more ferocious, thinking that darkness can cover up their sins. But the justice of heaven is vast, and the truth will come to light sooner or later, and evil will also be punished. As the village people planned to "visit" the girl, they said, Let's go see her, who will know[12]? People are afraid of the dark, which also makes night the protective color of villains. They often choose to commit crimes at night because "no one knows". Finally, they were killed.

4.2. Terror Environment

In Gothic literature, eerie scene constructions are often used to contrast the terrifying atmosphere. For example, in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat," the perverted protagonist brutally kills his wife and cat and seals them in the basement, where the police find scenes of burying them extremely frightening. The child was taken to a monastery (at that time Catholicism was no longer very popular, the monastery was deserted, and the villagers felt that it had become a fiefdom, with spotted owls and warehouse owls nesting in the monastery tower, and many bats). The girl lived alone in the lonely and terrifying basement of the monastery, which had been in disrepair for a long time. She had never seen anyone else except the woman who delivered her meals every day. The villagers predicted that she would die soon, and they believed that no one could survive in such a harsh living environment. After all, it was a "demon territory", a terrifying place where bats and owls roamed. No one protects her, maybe she will be eaten by animals or bitten to death by snakes, but she will definitely not live long.

The terrifying atmosphere in Gothic novels is not presented locally, but runs through the entire text, forming the main tone of darkness and terror. After men in the village committed a crime, they disappeared, leaving only the saliva of the owl they belonged to. Gaiman did not directly describe the process of owls eating humans, but instead used his dreams to show that the villagers had become mice, afraid of being eaten by big birds. There were howls, scratches, and screams around him. The author's writing method provides readers with ample imagination space, careful thinking and extreme fear, and has a warning effect of resisting evil.

4.3. The Evil of the Human

The most terrifying thing is the inner evil of the villagers. The old lady in the village said that the girl is the daughter of an owl and must be burned because she was not born from a human mother. A lonely and helpless baby girl was charged with innocence, and the village lady actually suggested burning the baby. Just because the baby held the spit of an owl in her hand, they determined that she was not born from humans and was an alien. They hated alien life and believed that the baby girl should be burned. Fortunately, she was stopped by a wise man. Although she saved her life, the girl was thrown into a deserted monastery where the village women took turns delivering food, which led to the village people's gambling. Surprisingly, the girl survived and had a beautiful appearance, but the village women spread that the girl had an excellent appearance and could not speak. So everyone gathered to discuss and "visit", "Meaning by visit, that they did intend to ravish her." The men in the village went to do evil in the middle of the night because the girl couldn't speak, and even if she was bullied, she couldn't tell anyone. The girl was their "food on the plate".

The girl started screaming, but those people didn't stop, the grille darkened, the moonlight was blocked outside, and there was a loud flapping sound coming from around. But none of those people went to look, and they were busy doing bad things. The people in Dymton dreamed of whistling, scratching, and screaming, as well as huge birds, and they dreamed of becoming little mice. The "loud flapping sound" indicates the abundance of owls, blocking the moonlight, making the windows dim and the sound loud. As a result, people hear the sound and dream of the "whistling sound". The "scratch sound" and "scream sound" can be thought of as the sound made by the villains and owls resisting, as the "big birds" grabbed and pulled at the men and eventually devoured them alive. The "scream" was the sound made by a young girl, who was frightened by these thugs, and then when the owl arrived, it was replaced by the thugs screaming, afraid, and frightened. The remaining people in the village dream of turning into mice, and in their dreams they become owls' plates for food.

The villagers conspired to "visit" the girl and destroy the stunning girl, leading to the tragic ending of the village men gathering to bully and eat the girl. The people in the village who harbored malicious thoughts but did not take action were also awakened in their dreams, experiencing the fear and powerlessness of being eaten, just like the fear and helplessness of a girl towards the violent behavior of a villain. If she participates in the persecution process, the outcome is similar to that of men.

She looked at them with her big eyes and made a subtle cry, as if begging them not to harm her. The people in the town laughed because they were already trying to do evil. They were a group of thugs who came to find her at night. The girl started screaming, but those people didn't stop. Although there was a "brother" who had his own sister and a "father" who had a daughter inside, grandfathers who have granddaughters, but they do not empathize or show mercy, they just do evil. The Reeve of Dymton opened the door of the monastery. Instead of persuading violent actions, the village chief assisted the tyrant in his actions. The leaders have not set an example, making it even more difficult to expect the villagers to uphold the bottom line of justice. The girl did not apologize to the villagers, let alone hurt others. She was abandoned in the wasteland, without education, unable to speak, and no one to rely on, making her the "perfect" target of harm for the villagers. The human heart is terrifying, and bad people will not let go of the beautiful girl. They will pull her into the abyss and put her in a suffocating environment.

Many years later, some people said they had seen the girl from a high place - it was a high place like an oak tree or a cliff top, but most of it was seen at night or in the dark, and no one could be certain that it was her. The girl's illusion appeared again in "night" or "dim", or on a tree or cliff. Her appearance warned villagers not to harm innocent girls casually. The irony is that the girl

grew up safely to the age of fourteen in places where bats, owls, and various beasts roamed, and appeared beautifully, but was destroyed by a group of human beasts.

Fortunately, during the tense moment, the supernatural power of wisdom heavily punished the villains. Although Gothic novels strive to portray social evil and reveal the dark and ugly aspects of human nature, goodness does not disappear, but rather competes with evil and is accompanied by intense moral exploration. This presents a bright light, that is, the ideological spirit of punishing evil and promoting good behind the dark terror, which has important research value. Gothic novels highlight the complexity of human nature, arousing readers' strong interest in reading and enduring contemplation and vigilance[13]. Readers see the dark light at the end of the novel, helping us see the dark side of this world without truly experiencing it.

As Gaiman said, "reading novels is an escape from intolerable things, a pathway to a warm, comfortable, and well regulated non real world. Stories allow us to understand life that we have never experienced or cannot experience firsthand." When reading novels, feeling pain is real; being able to feel beauty is also true. Because we are at a distance and maintain sympathy, we reflect on others' misfortunes and gain enlightenment, so this sense of terror and pain is mixed with some joy. Anything that can cause pain or danger in a certain way, that is, anything that can be terrifying in a certain way, involves terrifying objects, or functions like terror, is a source of sublimity. This short story brings a sense of fear, Fear is the highest effect of sublimity[14], and the elimination of terror transforms into aesthetic pleasure, generating a sense of sublime beauty. When this enlightenment purifies us, our hearts will cultivate a free and positive upward personality power to resist evil.

5. Conclusion

Gaiman used a terrifying tone to write "The Daughter of Owl". This article interprets the terrifying charm of the Gothic novel from the perspectives of representation --- symbolism, foreshadowing, the author's time choice, environmental description, and the characters' inner terrifying characteristics. In the text, the author chooses the owl, which symbolizes wisdom and death, to act on behalf of the heavens, and carefully sets the foreshadowing for the future, making readers marvel at Gaiman's clever thinking. The choice of night and the depiction of terrifying environments, as well as the highlighting of the dark side of the human heart, enable readers to experience the lingering terror in their hearts, feel scared, and generate a sense of sublime beauty, maintain sympathy, gain enlightenment, self purification, and generate a positive and upward personality power to resist evil.

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