

Tribhuvan University

Gothic Horror: Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," "The Signal-Man," and "The Trial for Murder"

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, Tribhuvan University, in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English

by

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April 2018

Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled
“Gothic Horror: Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol,” “The Signal-Man,” and “The Trial for Murder””
is my own original work carried out as a Master’s student at the Department of
English at Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus except that assistance from others
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All sources used for the thesis paper have been fully and properly cited. It contains no
material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of
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April 2018

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Gothic Horror: Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol,” “The Signal-Man,” and “The Trial for Murder”” submitted to the Department of English, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, by Suresh Khadka, has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my respected research advisor Prof. Dr. Bijay Kumar Rauniyar for his constructive comments and valuable suggestions.

I am also obliged to Mr. Pradip Sharma, Head of the Department of English, for the approval of this research. I am equally grateful to my parents and family members for their love and support, especially to my cousin Ganesh Khadka for his help and encouragement during the process of writing.

Finally, I thank Mr. Toya Nath Bhatta, director of Kautilya School, for allowing me an extended leave for the timely completion of the thesis paper. I also owe my gratitude to the members of Kautilya Secondary School for their immense trust, support, and favour during the thesis writing.

April 2018

Suresh Khadka

Abstract

This thesis focuses on Gothic horror in Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," "The Signal-Man," and "The Trial for Murder". It attempts to explore how Charles Dickens has embraced the Gothic in these stories, contributing to Victorian Gothic. He uses some basic elements of Gothic to stimulate horror in these works, and presents the encounters of his characters with mysterious and supernatural experiences. His stories are coloured with mystery and suspense which evoke the atmosphere of dread and horror, and deal with Gothic themes like isolation, fear, supernatural, uncanny, uncertainty, gloom, revenge, mystery and suspense. The thesis is based on theoretical perspectives, chiefly, of Sigmund Freud, and Edmund Burke, as well as Gothic studies.

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Gothic Horror: Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," "The Signal-Man," and "The Trial for Murder"

Gothic Horror and Dickens

Gothic is a type of romantic fiction that pre-dominated the English literature during the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. The term "Gothic" originally referred to the Goths, an early Germanic tribe which once invaded England. For centuries, the word stood for medieval barbarism. The concept of the term later on extended bearing the religious as well as political meaning, hence, Victor Sage affirms:

"Gothic" could connote any of a wide range of overlapping senses: horrid, barbarous, superstitious, Tudor, Druid, English, German, and even Oriental. Its most obvious reading for a modern reader is perhaps 'anti-classical' or 'medieval'.... But it is doubtful if all eighteenth century readers saw a schematic way as the opposition between 'classical' and 'anti-classical' implies. 'Anti-classical' covers a whole host of things. One familiar meaning of 'Gothic', for example, assumes that it is barbarous, Catholic, feudal and Norman in origin- everything opposed to the civilized 'Augustan' classicism of contemporary England.... In religio-political terms, Luther's second rejection of the Empire of Roman Catholicism is assimilated to the first rank of Rome by the Goths. 'Gothic' in this tradition, suggests not darkness but a rude form of 'democratic' enlightenment. (17-18)

In the line with Sage, describing the various forms of Gothic, George Haggerty opines:

The term Gothic has come to mean quite a number of things by this day and age. It could mean a particular style of art, be it in the form of novels, paintings, or architecture. It could mean medieval or uncouth. It could even refer to a certain type of music and its fans. What it originally meant, of course, is of, relating to, or resembling the Goths, their civilization, or their language. (183)

Therefore, we can rightly assert, from Sage, and Haggerty, that the term “Gothic” has come to denote a number of things. It may refer to a particular style of art- in the form of fictions, paintings, architecture or music; it may mean “medieval” or “uncouth”. The term can also refer to anything wild, barbarous and destructive of classical civilization. Furthermore, it can also denote any style of building that was not classical.

In literature, the term Gothic is a particular form of the popular romantic novel of the eighteenth century that continued its appearance in the early decades of the nineteenth century too. Patrick Kennedy defines Gothic literature as “writing that employs dark and picturesque scenery, startling and melodramatic narrative devices, and an overall atmosphere of exoticism, mystery, and dread” (np). This style usually portrayed fantastic tales dealing with horror, despair, the grotesque, supernatural, and other dark subjects, involving especially frightening and threatening characters.

Gothic literature evolved out of explorations of the inner self, with all of its emotive, non-rational, and intuitive aspects. Thus, it emerged as a form of romanticism, but confronted the darker, shadowy side of the self. Gothic works force the reader to consider all that society calls evil in human life. By extension, it came to designate the macabre, mysterious, fantastic, supernatural, and terrifying. Gothic introduces the notions of uncanny, revenge, sublimity, schizophrenia, terror and horror.

Gothic made its appearance in literature through Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). He first applied the word 'Gothic' to the novel with the subtitle – 'A Gothic Story'. In giving the novel a Gothic look-out, Walpole sets the story in a medieval Italian Castle where several fantastic and supernatural happenings take place- mysterious sounds, doors opening and closing themselves, pictures moving on their own- causing an atmosphere of dread and horror. The gothic tradition continued with the erotic and sadistic subject in William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786), where Beckford employs violence and supernatural to ignite Gothic horror. According to John Mullan, novelists rediscovered Walpole in the 1790s. As per him, "the doyenne of Gothic novelists was Ann Radcliffe, and her most famous novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794)" (np). William Godwin, in the same year, extended the territory of gothic through his work *Caleb Williams*, presenting a brooding atmosphere of gloom and terror, and representing events that are uncanny and macabre. Likewise, Matthew Gregory Lewis nourished the genre with his much popular *The Monk* in 1796.

The Gothic genre culminated in the nineteenth century. Mullan states, "A second wave of Gothic novels in the second and third decades of the 19th century established new conventions" (np). Mary Shelly fused science with supernatural in her celebrated novel *Frankenstein* (1818), attempting to tell the story of a young scientist who creates a grotesque monster; and Charles Maturin featured an anti-hero who sells his soul to a devil in exchange of 150 extra years of life in *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820). Likewise, James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) introduced the motif of "double" with the story of a man pursued by his own double.

Gothic is used in a far broader range of contexts than it has been since the 1760s. To quote David Punter, "what is, perhaps, most distinctive about contemporary Gothic is the way in

which it has followed the tradition of not merely describing but inhabiting the distorted forms of life, social and psychic, which follow from the attempted recollection of primal damage” (178).

We can observe the revelation of the fragmentation of personality as well as the mental disintegration and cultural decay in Gothic. We find the emphasis on dark side explore the unconscious world of desires and fears that individual and society suppress. Gothic has been used to describe elements of the macabre and terrifying in Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), and Charles Dickens’ *Bleak House* (1853) and *Great Expectations* (1861). Likewise, Bram Stoker’s novel *Dracula* (1897) established many conventions of subsequent vampire fantasy.

Charles Dickens is one of the prominent English writers of the Victorian period. He created some of the world's best-known fictional characters and is regarded, by many, as the greatest novelist of the Victorian era. He leads the Victorian literature to its highest peak. Dickens, a fierce critic of the poverty and social stratification of Victorian society, took the Gothic writing in his work to draw attention to the dark shadows and hidden corners of modern society. His Gothic moves away from the castles, abbeys and mountain landscapes of the Romantic period and sets in London, particularly. He carries the theme of crime, vice, social evils etc. in his works. He used Gothic to add drama and intensity to the plight of his characters. Thus, Dickens’ Gothic is infused with social issues and domestic narratives, and it expects some kind of social and moral reformation.

Dickens also had a deep interest in supernatural phenomena. His natural inclinations towards drama and the macabre made him a brilliant story teller of ghost tales. A full range of gothic talents can be seen in his *The Haunted Man and the Ghost’s Bargain* (1848), *Bleak House* (1853), and *Great Expectations* (1861). In *The Haunted Man and the Ghost’s Bargain*, Dickens

introduces Gothic through Redlaw, an unhappy professor, who is visited by his “double”. The ghost sweeps away Redlaw’s painful memories, only to find him angry rather than happy. Likewise, in *Bleak House*, he describes London with surreal, nightmarish intensity where the streets are awash with mud. He uses Gothic imagery to heighten the emotional drama where the lawyer, Tulkinghorn, who seeks to blackmail Lady Dedlock is described as resembling “a larger species of rook”. There is also something Satanic about Tulkinghorn who always dresses in black and his clothes “never shine”. His *Great Expectations* is rich with mystery and suspense, for instance, when Pip is looking at the grave of his parents in the churchyard in the evening, suddenly a fearful man appears before me. Similarly, revenge theme is found in the story as Miss Havisham, deceived by her lover, trains Estella to break men’s heart; she wrecks her vengeance upon male sex through Estella’s beauty. Besides, his other ghost stories like “The Goblins who Stole a Saxton,” “The Ghost in the Bride’s Chamber,” “Christmas Ghosts,” “The Haunted House” have also contributed the Victorian Gothic tradition of the time.

Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol” revolves around Ebenezer Scrooge and his transformation from a miser, cold hearted businessman to a generous person after the visitation by the spectre of Marley, and the three Christmas Ghosts. The horror in the story evolves after he is visited by the ghost of Mr. Marley, his business partner who died seven years back, on Christmas Eve. Though the appearance of the ghost does not terrify him at first as Scrooge believes it as a figment of his imagination, but later he gets frightened and asks the ghost on the purpose of his visit. The ghost reveals to Scrooge that he is there for his friend’s own good and informs that he would be haunted by three Spirits on the following three nights. The Spirits takes Scrooge to his past, present, and the future. When he sees them, he gradually starts to feel compassionate, and at the end we find him converted to a kind man.

In “The Signal-Man”, the narrator goes to see the signal-man in an underground railway tunnel. At first, the signal-man is disturbed by the addressing of the narrator; he even feels like he has seen the narrator before too, though they are meeting each other for the first time. The signal-man reveals that he sees a spirit standing at the end of the red light; it calls him, rings his bell; and whenever he sees the spectre, some accidents and deaths follow. He is troubled by his inability to understand the warning that the spectre’s presence communicates, and as a result he, somehow, considers himself responsible for not being able to avoid the accident and save the life of the people. The signal-man sees the ghost for the third time, waving at him and saying, “For God’s sake clear the way!” The next day, the narrator finds that the signal-man is hit by a train at his back.

In “The Trial for Murder”, Dickens presents a story where a victim’s ghost takes a seat in the jury at the trial of his killer to avenge him. In the story, the narrator sees two persons walking one behind the other in a street, and later he sees them in the Court trial as the murderer and the spectre of the murdered man. The spirit appears on several occasions, in the jurymen’s bedroom, in the court trial, but only the narrator sees it. During the court proceedings, it disturbs the discourse of the witness and the juror who tries to misrepresent the reality. It keeps appearing in the court trial session until the justice is ensured.

Freudian and Burkian Perspectives of Gothic Horror

Uncanny is one of the prominent aspects involved in Gothic literature and art. Human mind and its expectations can be divided into normal and strange. Socially initiated beings take regular things as normal, conventional one. Since they are used to these things, no sense of difficulty gets aroused by these things. But when unconventional or unexpected things appear,

mind loses its composure; often, a sense of unintelligibility shrouds us in such situation, and we feel uncanny horror and terror.

Sigmund Freud writes the “uncanny” is English equivalent to the German “unheimlich” which means “frightening and unfamiliar” (219). It undoubtedly belongs to all that is terrible and which arouses dread and creeping horror. The uncanny is not only frightful but also has hidden secrecy. Freud considers animism as an uncanny. Illustrating it, Freud opines, “uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes, and so on. It is this factor which contributes not a little to the uncanny effect attaching to magical practices” (244).

For Freud, something imaginary coming into life all of sudden is strange and frightening. When a familiar inanimate thing comes to life, it goes beyond mind’s acceptance, and what mind fails to accept is unfamiliar; and it is the unfamiliar whose abrupt presence grips a person in horror.

Uncanny usually takes place in the mind, and plays hallucination and confusion.

Unconscious dark forces exert their force in the formation of uncanny experience.

Psychoanalysts argue that sometimes we can experience uncanny things even in the outer physical realm. It is not because such things really exist there. What happens is, we project our fear, anxiety and other powerful yet dangerous feeling onto the objects outside. As we know, we don’t see what we see; we see what our mental make-up directs us to see. So, the physical condition often forces us to see the strange fearful scene outside the world. Dark, often, is the most fertile place for this kind of projection. The unintelligibility of dark provides a space in which we can colour anything we like. The mind makes the trick and often uncanny is projected.

Supernatural is the state of the “uncanny”. *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* defines supernatural as “events, forces or powers that cannot be explained by the laws of science” (1553). It is a genre of the Gothic in which the laws of everyday reality remain intact and permit an explanation or even dismissal of allegedly supernatural phenomena. The uncanny tale of horror converges in the fantastic tales, where there is fantastic hesitation in the implied reader that is eventually resolved toward the supernatural. The uncanny tale of horror is distinct in the kind of pleasure.

Doppelgänger is also an aspect of uncanny. The word “doppelgänger” comes from German; it means the “doublegoer”. A doppelgänger is often the ghostly counterpart of a living person. It is a psychic projection which possesses the traits of both complementary and antithetical to the character involved. It confronts and recognizes the dark aspects of one’s personality. Freud says:

we have characters who are to be considered identical because they look alike. This relation is accentuated by mental processes leaping from one of these characters to another—by what we should call telepathy—, so that the one possesses knowledge, feelings and experience in common with the other. Or it is marked by the fact that the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt.... And finally there is the constant recurrence of the same thing ... (234).

According to Freud, doppelgänger shares something in common or at least a thing similar to each other. The resemblance with each other, be it in terms of the physique, attitude or behaviour, forces the mind to identify the self with each other. This identification of the self with the other

leads to doubt and confusion, and when the subject is in the frequent encounter of the identical self, it becomes uncanny, i.e. frightening.

Gothic fiction seems to have been influenced by schizophrenia. Schizophrenia, as described in *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, is “a mental illness in which a person becomes unable to link thought, emotion and behaviour, leading to withdrawal from reality and personal relationships” (1366). Thus, schizophrenic group of illness is marked by a disintegration of the thought processes, hallucinations, and an unrealistic and wholly subjective relationship with the outside world, based on fantasy. They all involve disturbance of thoughts, emotions, and contacts with reality. Schizophrenia is a general label for a number of mental disorders with various cognitive, emotional, and behavioral manifestations. These disorders may include thought disturbances, bizarre delusions, hallucinations, disturbed sense of the self, and loss of reality testing. Therefore, it literally means splitting of mind, which shows dissociation between the functions of feeling or emotion on the one hand, and those of thinking or cognition on the other.

Gothic sublimity is the term that is frequently used in Gothic fiction. According to Edmund Burke, anything that stirs the notion of pain and danger and inflicts terror is a source of sublime. Defining sublime as the strongest emotion that one is capable of feeling, in the essay “Of the Sublime”, Burke states:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.... When danger or

pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible. (20-1)

Something that is mysterious happenings, vast exotic objects, and dreadful deaths are capable of raising the ideas of sublime, because they are considered as objects or terror.

Burke has given terror an aesthetic representation by explaining it as a source of sublime. According to him, “No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear. For fear being an apprehension of pain or death, it operates in a manner that resembles actual pain. Whatever therefore is terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too...” (40). He holds a view, “to make anything terrible obscurity seems in general to be necessary” (41). From Burke’s perspective objects that are vast, magnificent, and obscure generate sublime emotions. As per him, terror is the ruling principle of sublime. However, Burke did not distinguish between the subtle gradations of terror and horror; he only related terror to beauty and did not concern the beauty of horror, the grotesque power of something ghastly. In this regard, Devendra P. Verma sheds some light on the term “terror” and “horror”. He differentiates these words as “an awful apprehension and sickening realization” (23). Terror creates an intangible atmosphere of psychic dread but horror resorts to a cruder presentation of the macabre by an exact portrayal of the physical horror. Verma further attempts to make it clear:

Violence, pain, and terror are ideas heterogeneously yoked together thus making a combined attack upon the mind. “Horror” approaches violence in its intensity: “terror” when sufficiently violent embodies horror.... And the effect of horror is what Arjun felt in the Bahgavad Gita: my mouth goes dry, my body shakes and my hair stand on end. (130)

According to Verma, terror is more psychological, it is more in one's mind; but when terror reaches its intense point in the mind, it no longer remains only psychological, rather it is released through physical means, and terror now converts into horror.

Revenge, another prominent element, is characterized as the act of repaying someone for a harm that the person has caused. It may be enacted upon a loved one, a family member, a friend, an object, on whole humanity and also upon the society. The Gothic version of revenge is the idea that it can be guiding force in the background of the dead.

Mystery is a term taken from the Latin word *mysterium* which means a secret thing. It is also closely related to the Latin word *mysterium tremendum*, which is a term used to express the overwhelming awe and sense of unknowable mystery felt by those to whom some aspect of God or of divine being is revealed. It is an event or situation that appears to overwhelm understanding. Mystery is defined as "a person or thing that is strange and interesting because you do not know much about them or it" (1011) in *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. Hence, its province is unnatural, unmentioned and unseen. There are sudden appearances and disappearances, and death often guided by mystery. However, in the end all these complications are resolved.

Gothic Convention in "A Christmas Carol"

A wide range of Gothic convention of literature can be identified in Dickens' "A Christmas Carol". The story itself begins with death, as the story starts with the line- "Marley was dead, to begin with" (54). After the opening statement, Dickens sets the scene outside Scrooge's London office some seven years after Marley's death. Even though it is Christmas Eve, there is no cheerfulness: no snow, no children playing, no Christmas carols. The weather is

“cold, bleak, biting”. Describing the bleakness of the weather, Dickens writes, “The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without, that, although the court was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms” (58). The use of the pathetic fallacy creates an eerie, dark atmosphere for the audience. The metaphor of the fog “pouring in” illustrates a sense of imagery and by describing the houses as “phantoms”, Dickens creates a sinister feel.

The setting is an important Gothic convention. Scrooge lives in the building that once belonged to his deceased partner, Jacob Marley. The rooms are gloomy and dark.

It was old enough now, and dreary enough; for nobody lived there in it but Scrooge, the other rooms being all let out as offices. The yard was so dark that even Scrooge, who knew its every stone, was fain to grope with his hands. The frost and fog so hung about the black old gateway of the house, that it seemed as if the Genius of the Weather sat in mournful meditation on the threshold. (63)

Revenant and haunt from the dead are often prevalent in Gothic literature. In the story, Scrooge sees his dead partner Marley’s face in the door knocker. The narrative of Marley’s face is frightening:

Marley’s face. It was not in impenetrable shadow, as the other objects in the yard were, but had a dismal light about it, like a bad lobster in a dark cellar. It was not angry ferocious, but looked at Scrooge as Marley used to look; with ghostly spectacles turned up on its ghostly forehead. The hair was curiously stirred, as if by breath or hot air; and, though the eyes were wide open, they were perfectly motionless. That, and its livid colour, made it horrible; but its horror seemed to be

in spite of the face, and beyond its control, rather than a part of its own expression. (63-4)

Dickens further stirs the fear in the story through inanimate things as he relates the scene before Marley's ghost enters the room. He writes, "he [Scrooge] saw this bell begin to swing. It swung so softly in the outset that it scarcely made a sound; but soon it rang out loudly, so did every bell in the house" (65). Then suddenly the bells stop together at once, and the silence is followed by a "clanking noise deep down below as if some person were dragging a heavy chain over the casks in the wine merchant's cellar" (65). After a while, the door opens with a boom, and Scrooge hears that the noise comes much louder than before on the floors below, coming up the stairs, and coming straight to his door.

The gruesome costume of the unexpected guest also symbolizes horror. As Marley's ghost stands in front of Scrooge, he notices that the apparition has the identical face and costumes of Marley; but in addition to that, what is frightening about the spirit is "The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long, and wound about him like a tail; and it was made of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel. His body was transparent: so that Scrooge, observing him, and looking through his waistcoat, could see the two buttons on his coat behind" (66).

In a scene when Scrooge thinks that the ghost of Marley is only his hallucination and he says, "I have but to swallow this, and be for the rest of my days persecuted by a legion of goblins, all of my own creation. Humbug, I tell you: humbug" (67); but he is extremely horrified by the ghost as it cries and shakes its chain with such a dismal and appalling noise, that Scrooge holds on tight to his chair, to save himself from falling in a swoon. Scrooge gets so much petrified that he falls upon his knees, and clasps his hands before his face as the "phantom taking

off the bandage round his head, as if it were too warm to wear indoors, its lower jaw dropped down upon its breast” (67).

Apart from Scrooge’s encounter with Marley’s ghost, there are other scenes of terror too. One is when the ghost of Marley floats out upon the bleak, dark night, Scrooge follows him to the window and he sees “The air was filled phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restless haste, and moaning.... Every one of them wore chains like Marley’s Ghost; some few were linked together; none were free” (70).

The visitation of the three ghosts of Christmas in the story displays aspects of supernatural/ uncanny. When the Ghost of the Christmas Past visits Scrooge, light flashes up in the room upon the instant, and the curtains of his bed are drawn aside. The spirit has white hair, wrinkleless face, long and muscular arms, and the hands with uncommon strength. Its legs and feet are bare, and from the crown of its head there sprang a bright clear jet of light. According to Dickens;

when Scrooge looked at it with increasing steadiness, was not its strange quality... the figure itself fluctuated in its distinctness; being now a thing with one arm, now with one leg, now with twenty legs, now a pair of legs without a head, now an head without a body: of which dissolving parts, no outline would be visible in the dense gloom wherein they melted away. And, in the very wonder of this, it would be itself again; distinct and clear as ever. (73)

Dickens soars the terror too high leading to Gothic sublime when he introduces the Spirit of Christmas Yet to Come. By its mere presence, the ghost seems to “scatter gloom and mystery”, causing Scrooge to bend down on his knee. He cannot see the spirit more than vaguely

in the darkness. This ghost of Dickens excites true terror as “it was shrouded in a deep black garment, which concealed its head, its face, its form, and left nothing of it visible, save one outstretched hand” (103). Its mysterious presence fills him with a solemn dread. He senses it is “tall and stately” beside him:

Scrooge feared the silent shape so much that his legs trembled beneath him, and he found that he could hardly stand when he prepared to follow it. The Spirit paused a moment, as observing his condition, and giving him time to recover.

But Scrooge was all the worse for this. It thrilled him with a vague, uncertain horror to know that, behind the dusky shroud, there were ghostly eyes intently fixed upon him, while he, though he stretched his own to the utmost, could see nothing but a spectral hand and one great heap of black. (104)

The character of Ebenezer Scrooge is one of the Gothic elements of “A Christmas Carol”. His physical description gives a picture of a ghost like evil figure. “The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice” (57).

Moreover, “external heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, no wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to entreaty. Foul weather didn’t know where to have him. The heaviest rain, and snow, and hail, and sleet could boast of the advantage over him in only one respect. They often ‘came down’ handsomely and Scrooge never did” (57). It seems that Scrooge himself has some supernatural qualities.

Characters in Gothic writings are often one-dimensional, or stock characters. Though Scrooge goes through a dramatic change at the end of the story, he has definite Gothic characteristics at the beginning of the story. Scrooge is really a tyrant in the beginning. He keeps the office so cold that his clerk, Bob Cratchit, has to warm his hand by the candles as he works. Similarly, he very rudely dismisses his nephew's kind invitation of Christmas dinner. His evilness is revealed in the story when he cruelly suggests to the two men who come to ask for charitable donations that those who are poor and ill-fed should die and "decrease the surplus population" (61). When Scrooge meets Marley's ghost, who wears "the chains forged in life", we learn that Scrooge's chains, which he has been forging seven years longer, are already heavier than Marley's, if he could but see them.

Mystery and Suspense in "The Signal-Man"

"The Signal-Man" is a true ghost story. When the story opens, we find that the unnamed narrator calling out into a railway cutting- "Halloa! Below there!" (5). The signal-man standing on the railway below does not look up, but instead turns and stares into the railway tunnel he is monitoring. As the narrator calls down and asks permission to come down, the signal-man seems reluctant. The railway hole is cold, dark, and gloomy. The Gothic horror is created through the dark description of the railway tunnel, where the signal-man works, which is cold, dark, and gloomy as the narrator states:

His post was in as solitary and dismal a place as ever I saw. On either side, a dripping-wet wall of jagged stone, excluding all view but a strip of sky; the perspective one way, only a crooked prolongation of this great dungeon; the shorter perspective in the other direction, terminating in a gloomy red light, and

the gloomier entrance to a black tunnel, in whose massive architecture there was a barbarous, depressing, and forbidding air. So little sunlight ever found its way to this spot, that it had an earthy deadly smell; and so much cold wind rushed through it, that it struck chill to me, as if I had left the natural world. (7)

“The Signal-Man” covers the theme of mystery and suspense. Dickens uses mystery and suspense as a tool to arouse fear in the mind of, both, the characters and the readers. When the signal-man and the narrator first meet each other, they both fear each other’s presence. So strange does the signal-man act and appear that the narrator initially suspects that the signal-man is a ghost. “Before he stirred, I was near enough to have touched him. Not even then removing his eyes from mine, he stepped back one step, and lifted his hand” (7). He further says that he is not happy in opening any conversation with the man because he feels that there was something in the man that daunted him. The narrator’s fear of the signal-man becomes clear when he mentions, “The monstrous thought came into my mind as I perused the fixed eyes and the saturnine face, that this was a spirit, not a man...” (7).

On one hand the narrator is suspicious that the signal-man is not a man, and on the other the signal-man too seems afraid of the narrator. He feels that he has seen the narrator before and supposes the narrator as a spirit. He explains that the narrator’s greeting- “Halloa! Below there!”- was very similar to a ghost that he has seen by the tunnel’s mouth. Here, Dickens embeds the concept of doppelganger, an element of Gothic horror, with mystery and suspense for inflaming Gothic horror.

The aspects of supernatural or uncanny is a recurring element in Gothic horror, and Dickens in “The Signal-Man” employs it to ascend mystery and suspense, alongside the horror.

The signal-man is troubled by the appearance of spectre in the tunnel. He is restless as he says, “It calls to me, for many minutes together, in an agonized manner, ‘Below there! Look out! Look out!’ It stands waving to me. It rings my little bell...” (14). The signal-man is frustrated because he fails to understand the thing that the spectre’s presence communicates, and he is horrified more as every time the spectre appears, some accidents or deaths follow, and he is unable to save the life of people. When the signal-man saw the spectre for the first time, its left arm was across the face and it was waving the right arm as if implying to clear the way. He recounts the first accident that followed after he was visited by the spirit to the narrator, “Within six hours after the Appearance, the memorable accident on this line happened, and within ten hours the dead and the wounded were brought along through the tunnel over the spot where the figure had stood” (12).

Likewise, when the spectre appeared for the second time, it was leaning “against the shaft of the light, with both hands before the face”. The signal-man relates the accident scene that happened afterwards he saw the spectre for the second time:

That very day, as a train came out of the tunnel, I noticed, at a carriage window on my side, what looked like a confusion of hands and heads, and something waved. I saw it, just in time to signal the driver, Stop! He shut off, and put his brake on, but the train drifted past here a hundred and fifty yards or more. I ran after it, and, as I went along, heard terrible screams and cries. A beautiful young lady had died instantaneously in one of the compartments, and was brought in here, and laid down on the floor between us. (14)

Dickens, through the signal-man, describes the accident scene so vividly that it leaves a horrific impact upon the audience. Not only the readers, when the signal-man describes the train accident scene to the narrator, he involuntarily pushes his chair back, getting frightened.

Dickens culminates the feeling of suspense and dread to another level when the signal-man tells the narrator that he has seen the spectre for the third time, and it is alarming the signal-man of one more unknown but terrible thing, which, as usual, he fails to comprehend. Dickens leaves his audience to anticipate of an awful happening, but leaves them in an utter shock when he unfolds that happens after the third appearance of the spectre. Definitely, there follows death; but this time, not of the train passengers, but of the signal-man himself. “He was cut down by an engine, sir. No man in England knew his work better. But somehow he was not clear of the outer rail. It was just at broad day. He had struck the light, and had the lamp in his hand. As the engine came out of the tunnel, his back was towards her, and she cut him down,” (19) utters a witness of the accident to the narrator.

Forewarning and death are also essential features of Gothic that cause fear and horror. In the story, the signal-man receives several forewarnings from the spectre- it appears in the tunnel, calls him, rings the bells- but he falls short to extract the meaning every time. As the consequence of his failure in grasping those warnings of the spectre, awful deaths follow in the story. When the spectre appears for the first time, a severe train accident occurs, claiming life of many. Similarly, a beautiful young lady dies in one of the train compartments in a terrible train accident when the spectre visits the signal-man for the second time. And after the last (third) visitation of the specter, the signal-man is killed by cutting down by a train as the train driver mentions, “I saw him at the end, like as if I saw him down a perspective glass. There was no time to check speed, and I knew him to be very careful. As he didn’t seem to take heed of the whistle,

I shut off when we were running down upon him, and called him as loud as I could call” (19). Again, “I said, Below there! Look out! For God’s sake clear the way! Ah! it was a dreadful time, sir. I never left off calling to him. I put this arm before my eyes, not to see, and I waved this arm to the last; but it was no use” (19). Therefore, there are some instances of forewarning in the story where the signal-man is warned about the tragedies that would follow, but he fails to understand it to avoid the accident.

Revenge Motif in “The Trial for Murder”

Revenge is an essential feature of the Gothic. It is done to get satisfaction by deliberately inflicting injury in return for the injury inflicted on oneself. It can be enacted upon a loved one, a friend, an enemy, on humanity or upon society. The motif of revenge is obvious in Dickens’ “The Trail for Murder”. However, he handles it in a different way. In the story, the spirit of the murdered man attends the trial of the court to avenge his killer, “Although the Appearance was not itself perceived by those whom it addressed, its coming close to such person was invariably attended by some trepidation or disturbance on their part” (30). When the defense counsel tries to misrepresent the reality of the case, the spectre interferes and disturbs the discourse in the Court as the narrator presents:

When the leading counsel for the defence suggested the hypothesis of suicide, and the figure stood at the leaned gentleman’s elbow, frightfully staring at its severed throat, it is undeniable that the counsel faltered in his speech, lost for a few seconds the thread of his ingenious discourse, wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, and turned extremely pale. (30)

The spectre keeps continuing its appearance in the Court until the last closing minutes of the trial, until the justice is stored. The spectre disappears from the Court only after he avenges his murderer, only after the jury declares the man guilty. The narrator and foreman of the jury describes the final scene of the trial and the disappearance of the spirit from the Court as:

The murdered man at that time stood directly opposite the Jury-box, on the other side of the Court. As I took my place, his eyes rested on me with great attention: he seemed satisfied, and slowly shook a great gray veil, which he carried on his arm for the first time, over his head and whole form. As I gave our verdict, ‘Guilty’, the veil collapsed, all was gone, and his place was empty. (32)

Uncanny is a frequently repeated feature in Gothic writing. There are several instances of uncanny associated with revenge motif in the story which triggers terror and horror. In the beginning of the story, as the narrator looks out of the window of his room, he sees two men walking one behind the other in a street of Piccadilly. The man who followed the first had “his right hand menacingly raised”, and the narrator finds it really strange as, “Both men threaded their way among the other passengers with a smoothness hardly consistent even with the action of walking on a pavement; and no single creature, that I could see, gave them place, touched them, or looked after them” (22). The narrator further asserts that he could recognize the faces anywhere as “... the man who went first had an unusually lowering appearance, and that the face of the man who followed him was of the colour of impure wax” (22).

The narrator tells the incident of visiting his room by the man with face of “the colour of impure wax”, and the discovery that the man is a spirit.

My face was towards the only available door of communication with the dressing room, and it was closed. My servant's back was towards that door. While speaking to him, I saw it open, and a man look in, who very earnestly and mysteriously beckoned to me. That man was the man who had gone second of the two along Piccadilly, and whose face was of the colour of impure wax. The figure, having beckoned, drew back, and closed the door. With no longer pause than was made by my crossing the bedroom, I opened the dressing room door, and looked in. I had a lighted candle ready in my hand. I felt no inward expectation of seeing the figure in the dressing room, and I did not see it there. (23-4)

His servant further confirms the seeing of spirit when he asks him on it; the servant trembles violently and says, "O Lord, yes, sir! A dead man beckoning" (24).

The eerie things continue in the trial scenes of the Court too. The narrator feels difficulty in counting the jurymen and he states, "I found an inexplicable difficulty in counting them. I counted them several times, yet always with the same difficulty. In short, I made them one too many" (26-7). When he requests the brother jurymen to do the counting, he is surprised at his request and says, "Why... we are Thirt- ; but no, it's not possible. No. We are twelve" (27).

In a scene of the Court trial, where an evidence related to murder is to be examined by the Jury, the spectre takes the evidence from an officer and passes it to all the jurymen, and the proof comes back again to the narrator's possession. However, nobody notices it:

As an officer in black gown was making his way with it across to me, the figure of the second man who had gone down Piccadilly impetuously started from the crowd, caught the miniature from the officer, and gave it to me with his hands...

It also came between me and the brother jurymen to whom I would have given the miniature, and between him and the brother jurymen to whom he would have given it, and so passed it on through the whole of our number, and back into my possession. Not one of them, however, detected this. (28-9)

In another scene of the trial, when the case for the day was over and the Judge was turning his papers to sum up, the murdered man advanced to his Lordship's desk and looked at the pages over his shoulders. Immediately after that another eerie thing followed, "A change came over his Lordship's face; his hand stopped; the peculiar shiver, that I knew so well, passed over him; he faltered, 'Excuse me, gentlemen, for a few moments. I am somewhat oppressed by the vitiated air.' and did not recover until he had drunk a glass of water" (31).

There is another instance of uncanny when the narrator sees specter visit the bed of the eleven jurymen:

It stood for a few moments by the beside of each of my eleven brother jurymen, close to the pillow. It always went to the right-hand side of the bed, and always passed out crossing the foot of the next bed. It seemed, from the action of the head, merely to look down pensively at each recumbent figure. It took no notice of me, or of my bed, which was that nearest to Mr. Harker's. It seemed to go out where the moonlight came in, through a high window, as by an aerial flight of stairs. (28)

As the result of the visit, all the jurymen had dream of the murdered man, except the narrator and Mr. Harker.

The first encounter of the murderer and the narrator during the Court trial and the remarks of the killer for the narrator is strange, when he, targeting at the narrator, utters in affright, “At all hazards, challenge that man” (26). The murderer’s such unknown fear with the narrator is later revealed. When asked if has to say anything before death sentence should be passed upon him, his remarks appear in the newspaper: “My Lord, I knew I was a doomed man when the Foreman of my Jury came into the box. My Lord I knew he would never let me off because before I was taken he somehow got to my beside in the night woke me and put a rope round my neck” (32). The remarks of the murderer indicates that he had foreseen the fate of his trial. His intuition of being declared guilty at the hand of the narrator on the first day of the court trial is strange, thus uncanny.

Conclusion: Dickens’ Stories are Gothic

Dickens’ stories, obviously, are full of gothic features. Like in any other Gothic texts, he deals with the theme of isolation, fear, supernatural, uncanny, uncertainty, gloom, revenge, mystery and suspense in his stories too. His stories evoke the atmosphere of horror and dread, which displays his ability to build suspense with almost nightmarish intensity. He enters into the realm of the unknown. Being one of the dominant novelists of the nineteenth century and the Victorian Gothic, Dickens not only presents supernatural horror in his stories, but also pictures the social scenario of the time. The Gothic in his stories is handled with much better purpose than by most of his contemporaries.

In “A Christmas Carol”, Dickens fuses ghost story with morality for the moral transformation of Scrooge. Through the use of Gothic devices such as grotesque setting, cold character, animism, supernatural and uncanny, he has led gothic sublime in the story. The appearance of Marley’s ghost and the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come cause an eerie feeling,

generating dread and horror. Similarly in “The Signal-Man”, Dickens visits the theme of isolation, fear, uncertainty, supernatural, danger, and disturbed mind of a signal-man. He exploits mystery and suspense, a Gothic element, to evoke terror. Likewise, in “The Trial for Murder”, Dickens continues the revenge theme which is found in most of the Gothic writing. The story is rich with supernatural and uncanny incidents which are the weapons of horror in most Gothic writing.

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