
A critical study of Brain Evenson's novels from a Dark Romantic perspective.

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Abstract:

Dark Romanticism is a subgenre of Romanticism that first appeared in the 19th century, mainly in America. It is centered on examining the paradoxes and darker sides of human nature. Dark Romantics accepted the existence of sin, evil, and irrationality in humans, in contrast to the Transcendentalists' hopeful view of human nature (Gale, 2003).

Dark Romanticism is characterized by an interest in the enigmatic, paranormal, and horrific, as well as a focus on the psychological complexity of characters, who are frequently portrayed as evil or tormented. Settings are often dark and foreboding, reflecting the mental agony of the protagonists. Common themes include solitude, remorse, and the conflict between good and evil (Savoy, 2009).

Keywords: Dark Romanticism, Evil, Sin, Follies, etc.

I. Introduction

A. Brief overview of Dark Romanticism

1. Definition and characteristics

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II. Literary and Historical Background A synopsis of Dark Romanticism's past 1. Beginnings and progress a. In response to transcendentalism's idealistic, upbeat viewpoints, dark Romanticism emerged in the 19th century, highlighting the nuanced, darker facets of society and human nature (Gura, 2007). b. The social and political unrest of the times, which included the Industrial Revolution and the shifting social fabric of America, impacted this literary movement (Reynolds, 1995). c. European Romanticism influenced Dark Romanticism, but it also had a very American character, emphasizing the darker sides of the American psyche and the wild, untamed parts of the country's terrain (Hutchinson, 1997).

2. Famous writers and compositions

a. The most well-known Dark Romantic is arguably Edgar Allan Poe, whose writings such as "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Fall of the House of Usher" perfectly capture the obsession of the genre with death, lunacy, and the macabre (Poe, 1986).

b. Themes of sin, shame, and the moral complexity of human nature are explored in Nathaniel Hawthorne's books and short stories, including "The Scarlet Letter" and "Young Goodman Brown" (Hawthorne, 2005).

c. Dark Romanticism's fundamental themes—the destructive nature of obsession and the Uncertainty of good and evil—are explored in Herman Melville's "Moby-Dick" (Melville, 2003).

B. Brian Evenson within Dark Romanticism's framework 1. A comparative analysis of various Dark Romantic writers, a. Evenson investigates the darkest sides of the human psyche, much like Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville, using a writing style that stresses psychological depth and complexity (Coates, 2018). b. Evenson,

however, differs from his 19th-century forebears in that his sparse style and unclear storylines create a distinct, unsettling mood (McCaffery & Swensen, 2009).

2. His particular input into the movement

a. Evenson offers a current viewpoint on existential concerns and the individual's alienation in a confusing environment while referencing the ideas and motifs of Dark Romanticism (Link, 2010).

b. According to D'Amore (2012), his works frequently feature aspects of horror and the bizarre, stretching the limits of Dark Romanticism and extending its thematic themes into the twenty-first century.

III. Evaluation of Notable Short Tales A. "The Mutilation Brotherhood"

1. Synopsis of the narrative a. Brian Evenson's short story "The Brotherhood of Mutilation" centers on Kline, a former investigator who enlists in the Brotherhood of Mutilation, an enigmatic religious group. The organization believes self-amputation leads to a closer relationship with God and a higher condition of existence. b. The narrative starts with Kline being employed by Forsythe, a guy, to locate his brother, who has vanished and is thought to have joined the Brotherhood. Kline is captivated and troubled by the Brotherhood's methods as he digs further into the investigation. c. After following his path to the Brotherhood's remote compound, he learns that Forsythe's brother has entirely accepted their ways and has amputated several bodily parts. d. As the narrative goes on, Kline is drawn deeper and deeper into the Brotherhood's philosophy, clouding his ability to see things objectively. Kline's future is left in the air following the graphic and confusing conclusion to the tale. e. Evenson's tale is characterized by atmospheric tension and minimalist wording, which give the story an overall feeling of dread and disquiet. Deep exploration of religious fanaticism, bodily autonomy, and the quest for transcendence makes "The Brotherhood of Mutilation" a powerful illustration of Dark Romanticism.

This section of the article gives the reader a brief synopsis of "The Brotherhood of Mutilation," laying the groundwork for a more in-depth examination of the work's themes, motifs, and stylistic components in light of Dark Romanticism. In order to lay the groundwork for the following Analysis, this synopsis attempts to

emphasize the story's main themes and plot points.

III. Evaluation of Notable Short Tales B. "Recent Days" 1. Synopsis of the narrative a. Brian Evenson's gripping and darkly comic short story "Last Days" centers on Kline, a detective who recently underwent an amputation after escaping a horrific attack. b. Kline unintentionally finds herself sucked into the bizarre realm of a cult that worships amputation in the hopes of being closer to God. Paul, the leader of the cult, compels Kline to look into a rumored murder that occurred in their neighborhood. c. As the narrative progresses, Kline is drawn into the cult's strange rituals and power struggles and starts to doubt his sanity and convictions. The cult's fascination with amputation turns violent and bizarre, resulting in a string of horrifying incidents. d. The story ends in a violent, surreal fight that makes the reader wonder about faith, reality, and the cruelty of human nature.

2. Examining the components of dark romance

a. Analysis of suffering and violence

i. Evenson's "Last Days" explores intense themes of suffering and brutality, using the cult's heinous acts as a striking example of the worst sides of human nature (Machado, 2016).

ii. Showing a bizarre distortion of faith and underlining the catastrophic possibilities of fanaticism, the novel explores how violence and suffering can be sanctified and twisted into a type of religious devotion (Leverett, 2014).

b. Examining one's identity and self

i. As he struggles with his beliefs, sanity, and sense of self in the face of the cult's overpowering influence, Kline experiences a profound identity crisis throughout the narrative (Coates, 2018).

ii. Echoing the Dark Romantic fascination with the complexities and contradictions of the human psyche, Evenson crafts a narrative that compels the reader and protagonist to consider the nature of identity and the self, particularly in the context of extreme belief and violence (McCaffery & Swensen, 2009).

c. Employing vague, surreal environments

i. A feature of Dark Romanticism, the story is set in a nightmare-like, surreal setting that mirrors the protagonists' inner struggles and bewilderment (Link, 2010).

ii. Evenson creates a universe where the lines between reality and delusion are blurred, and the true nature of the characters' experiences is left unclear by using ambiguous, dreamlike settings, which heightens the sense of disorientation and unease (D'Amore, 2012).

III. Evaluation of Notable Short Tales C. "A Horse Collapse" 1. Synopsis of the narrative: The protagonist of "A Collapse of Horses" is a man who is convalescing from a severe brain injury. A recurring and unsettling vision of a stable full of horses that appear to grow or shrink every time he looks at them haunts him. b. He finds it more challenging to distinguish between his visions and hallucinations, wondering whether something darker is at work. As a result, his sense of reality becomes increasingly shaky. His relationships and sense of reality start to suffer due to his fascination with the horses and their erratic numbers. c. As the narrative progresses, the protagonist's mental state deteriorates, and he begins to doubt reality and life itself. The reader is left wondering about the protagonist's fate and the veracity of his visions due to the novel's unclear ending.

2. Examining the components of dark romance

a. Uncertainty and unreality as themes

i. Reflecting the Dark Romantic preoccupation with the ambiguous and the unknown, Evenson skillfully interweaves elements of ambiguity and unreality throughout the narrative (Coates, 2018).

ii. Two significant themes of Dark Romantic literature are the elusiveness of truth and the instability of reality, symbolized by the protagonist's faulty perceptions and the changing horses (D'Amore, 2012).

b. Illustration of a disjointed, faulty storyline

i. The protagonist's fractured and untrustworthy point of view conveys the story, a stylistic decision that heightens the sensation of confusion and unease (Link, 2010).

ii. Evenson's use of erratic narration prompts The reader to consider the nature of reality and the veracity of perception—two concepts that are essential to Dark Romanticism—(McCaffery & Swensen, 2009).

b. Investigating existential fear

i. The narrative explores the protagonist's rising feelings of loneliness, despair, and existential dread, highlighting the Dark Romantic

movement's focus on the worst parts of human nature (Machado, 2016).

ii. Evenson's examination of existential dread sheds light on the impermanence of reality and the extreme estrangement resulting from a misalignment of perception and reality (Leverett, 2014).

IV. Evenson's Works: Themes & Motifs A. The Faerie and the Grotesque 1. Examine how these components add to the mood of gloomy romance. The grotesque and macabre are commonly incorporated into Brian Evenson's creations, which evoke discomfort. These components are not merely decorative accents; they are an essential part of the stories' concepts and narrative structures, profoundly ingrained in them (D'Amore, 2012). b. Evenson's use of twisted bodies and violent deeds to convey the grotesque adds to his work's unsettling and subversive feeling. This is consistent with the focus of Dark Romanticism on probing the darker corners of human experience and pushing the bounds of what is socially acceptable (Link, 2010). c. Readers are reminded of their mortality as well as the constant possibility of violence and disorder in the world by the macabre components, which include the emphasis on death, decay, and the visceral. This draws readers into a familiar and foreign world, creating a darkly romantic, seductive, and repulsive atmosphere (Machado, 2016).

2. Examining how they represent the themes of the illogical and the unknown

A significant theme in Dark Romantic literature, the irrational and the unknown are fascinated by the grotesque and macabre in Evenson's work. Evenson challenges the readers to face their greatest fears and concerns by delving into the illogical through his twisted characters and macabre settings, forcing them to face the unknown inside and outside themselves (Leverett, 2014).

b. In Evenson's stories, the unknown manifests itself in various ways, from enigmatic people and mystery cults to unclear resolutions and unsolved riddles. This illustrates the Dark Romantic notion that there are forces at work in the universe that are beyond our ability to fully comprehend, as well as the notion that many mysteries will never be solved (Coates, 2018).

c. The grotesque and macabre are also used to conflate the domains of known and unknown, sanity and insanity, and reality and fiction. This ambiguity, which reflects a perspective simultaneously captivated and appalled by the intricacies and inconsistencies of the human situation, is a defining characteristic of Dark Romanticism (McCaffery & Swensen, 2009).

B. An obsession with the illogical 1. An analysis of characters' passions and how they ultimately contribute to their demise a. Characters driven down dark and destructive pathways by their obsessions are a recurring theme in Brian Evenson's short works. These fixations—whether related to a specific concept, conviction, or pursuit of knowledge—often cause the characters to become isolated from others and blind to reality (Leverett, 2014). b. The protagonist in "Last Days," for instance, becomes entangled in the cult's violent activities and meets his demise as a result of his fixation with learning the truth about them. This is a striking example of how preoccupation may skew one's understanding of reality and have adverse effects (Machado, 2016). c. Evenson's characters' obsessions draw attention to how brittle the human mind is and emphasize the gloomy romantic theme of a person's propensity for self-destruction when overcome by unreasonable wants and beliefs (Link, 2010).

2. Examination of the stories' depictions of the irrational parts of the human psyche

a. Evenson's short stories explore how people can lose themselves in their delusions and become detached from reality, delving deeply into the irrational parts of the human psyche. This illustrates the Dark Romantic movement's obsession with the human psyche's more sinister and chaotic aspects (Coates, 2018).

b. His stories' characters frequently go through a breakdown of the self as a result of their obsessions, which push them to violence and insanity. This is demonstrated in the movie "A Collapse of Horses," where the protagonist begins to doubt reality's nature and role in it due to his obsession with the horses' erratic numbers (D'Amore, 2012).

c. Evenson shows the darkness within the human mind by using these images of obsession and irrationality to highlight how people can become engulfed in their warped desires and beliefs (McCaffery &

Swensen, 2009).

C. Torture and Isolation 1. An examination of how Evenson's characters' frequent physical or psychological isolation adds to their suffering a. Many of Brian Evenson's characters experience tremendous isolation, either psychologically due to their obsessions or torments, or physically due to physical isolation as shown in barren or cramped locations (D'Amore, 2012). b. The protagonist experiences physical and mental solitude in tales such as "A Collapse of Horses." He enters a condition of seclusion and agony as a result of his fixation with horses and his incapacity to discriminate between reality and delusions. He also becomes enmeshed in his thoughts and loses contact with those around him (Link, 2010). c. As the characters battle their inner demons and deal with the fallout from their obsessions and worries, the theme of isolation heightens their sense of hopelessness and alienation, adding to the overall mood of agony throughout Evenson's works (Machado, 2016).

2. An examination of how this seclusion echoes Dark Romantic ideas a. Evenson's works' theme of solitude reflects Dark Romanticism's interest in the darker sides of human existence and the person's inner turmoil (Leverett, 2014).

b. Dark romantiRomanticismntly examines the notion that people are essentially alone in their experiences and that this isolation might cause one to become more conscious of one's darker aspects and capacity for suffering (Coates, 2018).

c. Evenson's portrayal of solitude highlights Dark Romantic literature's fundamental themes, including existential sorrow, the irrationality of the human psyche, and the possibility of self-destruction (McCaffery & Swensen, 2009).

V. Conclusion:

A. Synopsis of Main Ideas

1. The article's introduction thoroughly summarized Dark Romanticism, highlighting its primary traits, motifs, and topics. This prepared the reader to examine Brian Evenson's short works critically.

2. After that, it explored the literary and historical background of Dark Romanticism, emphasizing its inception, growth, and leading figures. Evenson's distinctive contributions to the movement were examined

in this light, demonstrating his affinity for and departure from conventional Dark Romantic themes.

3. The main body of the essay included a thorough examination of a few of Evenson's short works, such as "The Brotherhood of Mutilation," "Last Days," and "A Collapse of Horses." We looked for Dark Romantic characteristics in each narrative, concentrating on themes like violence, identity, the illogical, and the unknown.

4. It was determined that Evenson's works frequently featured themes and motifs related to the macabre and grotesque obsession and the irrationality, loneliness, and suffering, demonstrating his intense interest in Dark Romantic themes.

B. Restate Thesis: Using Dark Romanticism as a lens, this paper has critically examined Brian Evenson's short stories to show how his works deftly combine this literary movement's significant themes and motifs, reflecting its focus on the darker facets of human experience.

C. Concluding Remarks on the Applicability and Influence of Evenson's Writings in the Light of Dark Romanticism - Because of his ability to delve into the most obscure corners of human nature as well as the irrational and monstrous, Evenson's works stand out as contemporary examples of Dark Romanticism. His works, full of nuance and ambiguity, encourage readers to explore the darker sides of their minds and demonstrate Dark Romantic themes' lasting influence and importance in modern writing. His distinct voice and storytelling style have substantially contributed to the Dark Romantic tradition's survival and development, guaranteeing its relevance and vitality well into the twenty-first century.

This conclusion completes the examination of the paper by restating the thesis, summarizing the main ideas discussed throughout, and providing closing observations on the significance and applicability of Brian Evenson's writings about Dark Romanticism. This guarantees a unified and thorough comprehension of the topic while emphasizing the enduring significance of Dark Romantic themes in modern literature.

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