



“A Fun-Loving Girl with a Zest for Life:” Sex, Death, and Punishment in Lake Mungo

June 7, 2016 · Volume 20 (2016)

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Moody R. “A Fun-Loving Girl with a Zest for Life:” Sex, Death, and Punishment in Lake Mungo. PsyArt Journal. 2016 Jun 7 [last modified: 2016 Jun 7]. Edition 1.

Abstract

The faux documentary *Lake Mungo* (2009) chronicles the paranormal events that befall an Australian family after the drowning death of their teenage daughter, Alice. Troubled by sounds, photos, and video footage which suggest that Alice is not ‘gone,’ they embark on a series of efforts to find her. When they stumble upon a hidden ‘sex tape’ of Alice involved in an enthusiastic ménage a’ trois with the couple next door, they learn that the ‘fun loving girl with a zest for life’ has become a sexually transgressive woman. This study focuses on manifestations of the implied ‘punishment’ accorded Alice for her behavior which is suggested to be of both a temporal and spatial nature and meted out by both Puritanical supernatural agents and her own family. The former are presumably responsible for Alice’s ensuing premonitions of her death in which she finds herself trapped in her own drowned body as well as the drowning itself. However, Alice’s subsequent confinement to the family house as a ghost-like entity who watches but cannot interact is implied to be the result of her family’s refusal to let her go. In their various grief-stricken efforts to ‘raise’ her from the dead—from literally digging up her body, to faking manifestations of her in death—they have resurrected and ‘trapped’ her. Yet once they learn of her statutory rape, her subsequent traumatic premonitions, and discover presumably consolatory evidence that Alice is now with them in the house, they decide to sell and move away. This final, seemingly hostile act, would appear to be the final punishment— her temporal and spatial isolation apparently deemed to be an apt fate for a ‘good girl’ gone bad.

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