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Department of English Language and Literature**

**Colonial and Postcolonial Gothic Encounters: A
Comparative Study**

A PhD Thesis

Submitted By

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Preface

The thesis explores the relation between Gothic and Empire literature. While the two realms may initially seem unrelated, if one closely examines the discourse of Gothic literature, it becomes apparent that much of what is tackled therein is relevant to colonial literature as well.

The study aims to identify points of intersection between Empire and Gothic literature as far as ideologies and tools of representation are concerned. This paves the way to the second aim which is offering a more solid definition of colonial Gothic based on common features between its constituent forms. Third, it aims to understand whether postcolonial writers' appropriation of Gothic tropes is a subversive act that also expands the Gothic mode or a mere imitation of colonial Gothic ideologies and tropes.

As far as methodology is concerned, the researcher sheds light on some major common thematic concerns and tropes of representation between colonial and Gothic literature and then offers a more solid definition of the term colonial Gothic based on these common features. Moreover, the researcher compares how three colonial Gothic texts and three postcolonial Gothic works that are closely connected to their colonial counterparts rework those common features to express conflicting ideologies and concerns. The researcher attempts to provide a close textual analysis of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) in relation to Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) in relation to Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966) and E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) in relation to Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust* (1975).

The study attempts to answer the following questions: First, what are the common ideological concerns and tropes of representation between Empire and Gothic literature? Second, what are the major

defining characteristics of colonial Gothic? Third, how did colonial Gothic texts impact Britain's colonial interests? Fourth, why would postcolonial writers consciously experiment with a literary mode that is not only British, but is also predicated on the primitive, foreign and exotic? Fifth, are these works considered as mere imitations of colonial models or as effective tools of resistance? Sixth, what are the similarities and differences between colonial and postcolonial Gothic texts?

The thesis consists of three chapters in addition to an introduction and a conclusion. Each chapter tackles one of the form's defining features and compares how colonial and postcolonial writers rework this feature to express conflicting ideologies. Moreover, it examines whether the postcolonial texts in question reinvent Gothic tropes and offer a subversive stance or merely imitate colonial models.

The introduction offers a brief overview of the origin of colonial Gothic, its timeline, phases of development and distinctive features. Moreover, it attempts to offer a more solid definition of the form that takes into consideration thematic, ideological and stylistic features of the genre.

Chapter I entitled "Gothic Representations of the 'Self' and the 'Other' in Colonial and Postcolonial Contexts" examines the complex relation between colonial fears and characterization. It illustrates how fears of reverse colonization, going native and the decline of the Empire result in Gothic representations of the self and the other. It compares how colonial and postcolonial writers use Gothic tropes such as the figure of the ghost, the monster, the vampire, the cannibal, the dark enigmatic villain and the persecuted helpless heroine to express concerns about identity, liminal spaces, racial purity, cultural stereotyping and the distance between the self and the other.

Chapter II entitled "Gothic Representations of the 'Center' and the 'Periphery' in Colonial and Postcolonial Contexts" compares how

colonial and postcolonial writers appropriate the tropes of the secret room, Gothic ruins and the haunted, labyrinthine Gothic castle in their representations of both England and the colonies. Moreover, it sheds light on the accompanying feelings of physical and cultural entrapment during colonization and after independence.

Chapter III entitled “Colonial and Postcolonial Uncanny Encounters” examines the uncanny Gothic experiences that the colonizers and the colonized go through as a result of imperial atrocities. It draws on the concept of the uncanny as expounded by Sigmund Freud in his monumental essay “The Uncanny” (1919). It compares and contrasts how the different writers use manifestations of the uncanny to promote or subvert colonial ideology.

The conclusion offers an assessment of the issues raised in the thesis. It illustrates which postcolonial Gothic texts are able to creatively reinvent the tropes of the Gothic to offer subversive readings of their predecessors and which ones are mere imitations of colonial Gothic writing.

Introduction

Since its inception in 1764 at the hands of Horace Walpole with his novel *The Castle of Otranto*, Gothic literature became an instant success, particularly, with middle and lower class readership. David Punter notes that Gothic texts virtually dominated the market in the 1790s (9). He adds that in spite of the form's success with the reading public, many critics condemned the genre on account of both its content and form (8). Dani Cavallaro explains that in the 18th and 19th centuries, it was common to associate Gothic literature with "tastelessness, and with the consumption of pulp fiction by a supposedly unrefined, albeit economically ascendant, middle-class market and particularly with women" (9). It was usually deemed as a sadistic, crude and dehistoricized genre that instead of showing engagement with England's social and political realities, it indulged in torture, murders, dark secrets and sexual taboos; things that were considered harmful, especially to the delicate sensibilities of women and youth (Cavallaro 9).

Moreover, the genre was criticized for being an exhausted form that depends only on stagnant, formulaic tropes; ludicrous, repetitive plot lines and stock characters that create an atmosphere of crude horror. For example, Edith Birkhead, while acknowledging that the *Castle of Otranto* satisfied the readers' craving for the romantic and the marvelous, believes that the work lacks spontaneity. Its supernatural elements are undignified and the frightening episodes are not only "unalarmed but mildly ridiculous" (28). She adds that although the characters are colorless puppets, they set a trend and we keep meeting the same types again and again in later Gothic texts (30).

However, Gothic literature started to gain significant weight in the Academia when it started to be read through a psychoanalytical lens. Mike McCaustlin explains that Freud's ground-breaking essay "The Uncanny" (1919), which offers a reading of E.T.A. Hoffmann's

Gothic short story “The Sandman” (1816), pinpoints how literary Gothic tropes become a fertile field for psychoanalysis as Gothic works started to be seen as an articulation of people’s suppressed unconscious desires and as an attempt to break societal taboos. McCaustlin rightly maintains that the Gothic is “an amenable host to psychoanalysis. Its interest in taboo, strained familial ties, and displaced psychic topographies has been an irresistible enticement for critics predisposed toward psychological readings of literature” (2).

However, more recent scholarship started to view Gothic in a fresh eye and propose new models of interpretation that go beyond the psychoanalytical paradigm and operate within political, social and historical frameworks. How the Gothic engages with and manifests anxieties about power, race, gender, class, crime, urbanism, industrial revolution and colonialism became interesting fields of analysis. Anna Powell and Andrew Smith explain why the recent years have witnessed an impressive resurgence in critical interest in Gothic literature:

The pedagogic possibilities of the field are considerable. These include close analysis of specific textual operations, intellectual engagement in, and debate of, major critical theories and the study of historical and cultural contexts ... The neglected status of the mode in Higher Education was undermined by a “Gothic renaissance,” both literary and critical, which has been gaining momentum over the last twenty-five years. (1-2)

One of the interesting fields that the researcher wishes to explore is the relation between Gothic and Empire literature. While the two realms may initially seem unrelated, if one closely examines the discourse of Gothic literature, it becomes apparent that much of what is tackled therein is relevant to colonial literature as the rise of the Gothic coincided with the intensification of England’s colonial endeavor in the 18th and 19th centuries. Mike McCaustlin notes:

There is a xenophobic impulse that suffuses the development of the Gothic, an abiding suspicion of the foreign interloper that literally demonizes racial and cultural otherness. In fact, those traits that have come to define the Gothic literary genre bear a close resemblance to the dogma that fuels racist propaganda and imperial ideology: exotic landscapes, a preoccupation with the primitive and the barbaric, a fear of contamination, and an emphasis on racial and cultural difference vis-à-vis speech, mannerism, and physiognomy. Such features underscore the fact that Gothic villains are not just phantasms of repressed desire or guilt, but also manifestations of racial and imperial animus. (3)

McCaustlin words are extremely significant because they mean that imperialist ideology permeated texts that were largely seen as trivial apolitical thrillers in their own time and psychosexual manifestations in ours. That is why; the researcher is interested in examining how texts that were thought of as frivolous, unrefined entertainment had important ideological impact on a large number of people as they stealthily shaped their perceptions and made them internalize mental images of the Empire. Dani Cavallaro maintains that “it is vital to realize, therefore, that although the Gothic has time and again been branded as escapist, its tales are culturally, historically and economically relevant to a very tangible social reality” (9).

This opens the door for the researcher to examine 19th and early 20th century texts in a new light that brings colonial and Gothic discourses together. In order to do that, the researcher investigates how the Gothic novel in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries engaged with Britain’s imperial project through what many critics now call colonial or imperial Gothic.

Colonial Gothic or imperial Gothic is a term first coined by Patrick Brantlinger to describe a form of Gothic that is heavily loaded with themes of colonialism, dominance, race and invasion. The form

itself sprung as a result of Britain's haunting encounters with the natives of its various colonies. It reflects the challenges and anxieties of the colonizers such as the need to deal with other races, cultures and value-systems. Moreover, it tackled ethical and moral burdens of racism, desire for the other and the change in what it means to be human.

Sheri Ann Denison explains that since colonial Gothic sprung as a result of Britain's colonial endeavors in their far flung colonies, travel literature and adventure stories were key elements in the shaping of this form as they allowed the protagonists to explore the Empire and record what they have seen (103). Robbie B. H. Goh notes that imperial fantasies of travelling, soldiering, rescuing and fortune-hunting in dark exotic Gothic lands were very popular in the works of writers/adventurers such as Rider Haggard, Conan Doyle and R. L. Stevenson; colonial servants like Rudyard Kipling and seamen like Joseph Conrad.

Goh explains that colonial Gothic texts offer a spectrum of national attitudes ranging from picaresque survey of European competitors such as France, Spain and Italy, with implicit comparisons to England, to invasion stories in the colonies, with the explicit denouncement of the natives. In this sense, colonial Gothic becomes a kind of geopolitical travel literature which, according to Goh, expresses increasing awareness of national space and identity and uses movement from one place to another for political and ideological purposes. It aims to prove England's cultural superiority and justify colonial endeavors.

When attempting to define colonial Gothic literature, it becomes difficult to find a single comprehensive definition for a number of reasons. First, there is no consensus among critics on when it exactly evolved and consequently the texts that fall under this category. Patrick Brantlinger limited the form to works written between 1887 and 1916 (243). However, Andrew Smith and William

Hughes extended Brantlinger's original timeline and scope of form, adding works as early as William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786), Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya* (1806) and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) (4-5). While Brantlinger's timeline corresponds to the peak phase of the form, the researcher believes that the relevance of other earlier works to the form cannot be ignored.

Expanding the timeline brings us to the second challenge of definition which is the scope and nature of works that can be called colonial Gothic. As the form evolved throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, it took elements of and mingled with a broad range of texts such as travel narratives, adventure boy stories, supernatural tales, science fiction and even social criticism novels (Brantlinger 244). That is why, texts as diverse as *Vathek* (oriental supernatural tale), *Jane Eyre* (Victorian social criticism bildungsroman), *Penny Dreadfuls* (low priced adventure stories aimed at working class and adolescents), *Heart of Darkness* (a quest novella with psychological undertones) and *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (philosophical science fiction) fall under the category of colonial Gothic (Denison 105).

The third point that complicates the process of reaching a solid definition is the fact that colonial Gothic in the 18th and 19th centuries passed through three stages that echo stages of development of Gothic literature. A closer look at the three phases helps one understand how colonial ideas gradually infiltrated Gothic texts and accounts for the debate concerning the chronology of the form. Moreover, it illustrates that Gothic literature is not stagnant as it reinvents itself to cope with the changing social and political realities of England.

In the first phase, there is Continental Romantic Gothic, which roughly extends from the publishing of the *Castle of Otranto* in (1764) till Queen Victoria's ascension to the throne in (1837), coinciding with the Romantic period which witnessed political upheavals such as the American and French revolutions (Punter 62).

Punter explains that early Gothic texts engage with England's political problems and fears in a displaced manner (62). That is why, according to Mike McCaustlin, most of them are set in distant times and places usually in the Middle Ages or Renaissance and in southern European countries such as France, Spain and Italy with otherness taking the form of darker Mediterranean people and Roman Catholics (14). England's fear of the spreading of revolutionary tendencies coming from France, competition with other colonial powers and the desire to create a unique, modern English identity distinct from old Catholic Europe were expressed in the texts of this period. Roger Luckhurst notes that "Ann Radcliffe's harried heroines meander through lawless southern France, the sublime Alps and Italy. The dark doings in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) could only be imagined in the monasteries of Catholic Spain" (62).

Mike McCaustlin believes that apart from anti-European sentiment and display of British chauvinism, race in these early texts was a muted topic (14). However, the researcher disagrees with this view because while colonial and racial issues were not tackled as heavily or as overtly as they were in latter phases, this period produced works such as William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786) and Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya* (1806) which represent the beginning of colonial Gothic.

The second phase, namely high Victorian domestic Gothic (1840s-1870s), is characterized by a shift to contemporary time and space, i.e. present day England and, consequently, deals with colonial fears in an overt manner. Mike McCaustlin explains how colonial Gothic, at this stage, infiltrated bourgeois domestic setting and urban environment:

Racial menace infiltrates home. Race is brought across the Channel and unceremoniously dumped on the front doorstep of middle-class England. The bourgeois family is no longer protected by the buffers of time and place, but instead is shown

to be directly under threat. In *Wuthering Heights* (1847), the dark, orphaned gypsy figure, Heathcliff, is taken in by the Earnshaws, a middle-class Yorkshire family, leading to their eventual ruin; while in *Jane Eyre* (1847), the crazed Jamaican creole, Bertha Mason, stands as the major impediment to English middle-class romance. (14-15)

Moreover, this period witnessed an explosion in the publication and consumption of cheap colonial Gothic boys' adventure stories such as *Penny Dreadfuls*. Coinciding with an optimistic phase of colonialism, these texts, which mainly target working class adolescents, conjured up an incredible promise of fame, riches, and escape. Barish Ali explains how these texts propagated racial and colonial ideas as they portrayed:

the conflicts emerging from colonial contact—the plundering, the murder, and not the least the racism—as the primary way the colonial adventurer can come to any sense of self-realization even if this means, effectively, becoming no more than a scoundrel playing games at the back of the world. (1141)

McCaustlin's and Ali's words are important because they demonstrate how adaptable and widely prevalent the subgenre was even before the third and peek phase, fin de siècle/ degeneration Gothic which, according to many critics including Brantlinger, produced the most important and developed works of colonial Gothic.

Degeneration colonial Gothic works, which roughly last from the 1870's till World War I, represent a shift from an optimistic attitude towards colonial expansion to a pervading sense of instability and pessimism. Robbie B. H. Goh notes that the increasing rebellion in British colonies, the growing conflicts among major colonial powers, which finally led to World War I and Darwin's theories of evolution and regression created a strong feeling, of decline and gloom. Thus,

the three major fears that permeated most of the works of this period were fears of reverse colonization, racial degeneration and decline of the British Empire.

This brief examination of the origin of colonial Gothic, its timeline, as well as, the 3 phases of development it went through in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries is of immense importance when attempting to examine the defining characteristics of the form. James Procter and Angela Smith believe that just because a colonial text appears haunting or uncanny, it does not mean it is necessarily Gothic (96). That is why, the researcher finds it important to examine the features that the form takes from its two constituent terms and understand how distinctive Gothic elements regarding themes, characterization, setting and imagery create and justify colonial endeavors.

The researcher chooses to start with one of the most important features that bring together colonial and Gothic literature which is the ability to create and manipulate fear to achieve a political and ideological effect. Howard Malchow defines the Gothic broadly as “a language of panic, of unreasoning anxiety, blind revulsion, and distancing sensationalism,” and finds it at work in most imaginings of racial others throughout 19th century British culture” (4). Consequently, fear becomes an important defining feature of colonial Gothic texts as it profoundly affects all other defining elements of the literary mode. David Punter explains:

Fear is not merely a theme or an attitude, it also has consequences in terms of form, style, and the social relations of the texts; and exploring Gothic is also exploring fear and seeing the various ways in which terror breaks through the surfaces of literature, differently in every case, but also establishing for itself certain distinct continuities of language and symbol. (18)

Punter's words are emphatic because Gothic, stripped down to its most essential element, is a genre of fear and the main fears that permeate colonial Gothic, according to Roger Luckhurst, are fear of going native in the colonies; fear of what might move to the metropolis from the periphery i.e. reverse colonization and fear of the decline of the British Empire (64).

Luckhurst adds that in the colony, the colonizer is afraid of losing his physical and mental wellbeing, as well as, his cultural integrity. The large alien wilderness generates panic and anxiety. After longer periods of settling and dealing with the natives, corruption, moral deterioration and mixed race children posed real risks that the colonizers had to face (64-65).

Punter notes that colonial Gothic characters are haunted by the post-Darwinian reality of "the reversion of the species, the ever-present threat that, if evolution is a ladder, it may be possible to start moving down it" (244). Hence, in *Dracula* (1897), a bite from a vampire leads to degeneration and in *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), animal-human hybrids regress to their former animal selves, a devolution that the novel implies may eventually overtake London.

Moreover, Luckhurst notes that fear of reverse colonization dominates colonial Gothic texts. Prolonged contact with the natives can create networks through which exotic dangers can move from the colony to the center (65). During this turbulent period, invasion scare novels, in which England is attacked by European competitors and colonized subjects, dominated the literary scene and intrigued an ever growing reading populace (McCaustlin 16).

Texts such as H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887), in which Ayesha, an immortal Arabian queen, intends to replace Queen Victoria, and Pelham Grenville Wodehouse's *The Swoop* (1909), in which England sustains attacks by European, Asian and Russian forces, underscored