Postcolonial Gothic: Hybridisation of Genres and the *Dak* Bungalow

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The propensity of using Gothic as a classificatory term to evoke scenes of gargoyles, dungeons, and violence emerges from a conjecture that situates the genre in Western imaginary. However, with the emergence of Postcolonial Gothic in the last few decades, Gothic has metamorphosed into a theoretical framework that lends itself to other modes of scholarship. Postcolonial Gothic contradicts the Eurocentric purity with which Gothic is usually associated. Postcolonial writers like Salman Rushdie have employed the gothic register to write about the themes of home, homelessness, and alienation, articulated in the postcolonial notion of alterity. Rushdie's use of Postcolonial Gothic, marked by its affective quality, distortion of history, and for using the logic of the phantom, blurs the line between history and fantasy, facts and myths, past and present, thus eliciting a fraught effect in its readers. In this transgression of the Gothic Self to signify the Postcolonial Other, writers have hybridised Gothic into a theoretical stance called the Postcolonial Gothic.

By using the Derridean 'Genre Theory', this paper traces theoretical affinities and divergences between Gothic and Postcolonial scholarship that led to the emergence of Postcolonial Gothic. Exposing the inherent problem of genre-making, I argue for the impossible periodisation and localisation of the Gothic. Instead, I propose that the portmanteau stance of Postcolonial Gothic emerges from an inherent inclination towards monstrosity and hybridisation that befits these genres. Lastly, in situating the Gothic outside of global North and in the South—specifically in the Indian subcontinent—I chart out how the gothic motif of the haunted house travelled to India with British colonisation. Upon reaching the Indian subcontinent, the motif of the haunted house mingled with the local folklore to create the horror stories of *dak* bungalow, the haunted house of the East. I argue that the *dak* bungalow serves as a Contact Zone and a site of power struggles between the coloniser and the colonised. This section augments Postcolonial Gothic scholarship by arguing that as a Contact Zone, *dak* bungalow was susceptible to violence and that the horror stories of the *dak* bungalow were born out of racial anxieties that were projected onto this space by its inhabitants.

Gothic Studies

Often used liberally, Gothic renders itself for varied contextual uses: it can signify a historical phenomenon, an art form, and a psychoanalytical approach

of unveiling the repressed in literary texts. Historically, the gothic novel had its heyday in early eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe, a time characterised by social and political upheaval. Despite garnering attention as a cultural phenomenon and engendering expansive critical responses, Gothic refuses easy definitions. As a genre, Gothic revels in imaginary and literary excess, even at the risk of being melodramatic.

The ambiguous endings and the use of Final Girl trope in films *The Thing* (1983) and *Alien* (1979) exemplify how Gothic affects the audience. In the final scene of *The Thing*, the surviving duo MacReady and Childs blow themselves up because of the fear that one of them could be contaminated by the Thing and its alien powers. Even the death of all characters does not offer a cathartic moment because the narrative withholds whether the Thing that killed all the characters dies or survives to pose a threat to others who might encounter it. The film is open-ended, and the final scene does not offer any catharsis; instead, it elicits horror in the audience. Besides ambiguous endings, another trope that churns in horror films is Final Girl trope, most famously portrayed by Sigourney Weaver as Ripley in the first *Alien* movie. In a 2017 interview to promote his film *Alien: Covenant*, director Ridley Scott revealed that he would have preferred an alternate ending to the film in which the alien would have murdered all the characters, including the Final Girl: Ripley. Scott's insistence on denying any relief or cathartic moment to the audience exemplifies how horror relies on uncertainty to affect the audience.

Postcolonial Studies

The postcolonial genre, such as the Self that it expresses, is a distorted one as the postcolonial identity is muddled by the historical experience of colonisation, in some cases, only to be further displaced by globalisation and migration. David Punter, in his book *The Gothic* (2004), writes:

> For it could reasonably be said that the term 'postcolonial' itself has an inevitably distorting effect. In one sense this can be seen as unavoidable in that the postcolonial world itself is distorted; not, that is, in the sense of having been twisted away from some recognizable master-trajectory or severed from an imaginary origin, but in deeper senses to do with obfuscations of desire, impossible hybridity, the haunting ineradicability of paths not taken. (75)

Salman Rushdie, writing about his displacement in the essay *Imaginary Homelands* (1992), beautifully describes his disintegrated selfhood. Writing with a tinge of melancholy, Rushdie does not mourn his displacement but celebrates his migrancy as a vantage point from which one can speak properly and concretely on a subject of universal significance and appeal. Commenting on

the nature of absoluteness and unity in the context of postcolonial identity, he observes in a Proustian sense that "past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity" (12).

As a writer who has been displaced from his country and even out of his language, Rushdie's experiences are doubly removed and intensified by physical dislocation. He writes:

> We are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions. Partial beings, in all the senses of that phrase. Meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved; perhaps it is because our sense of what is the case is constructed from such inadequate materials that we defend it so fiercely, even to the death. (12)

In the tradition of other twentieth-century writers like Samuel Beckett and James Joyce, Rushdie does not consider migrancy to be a limitation but a liberation that unveils the fragmented nature of identity. In his fiction, Rushdie challenges the fixity that one associates with the transient idea of home. Rushdie argues that one cannot find home without physically and metaphorically journeying to the Self. This fragmentation of the Self is embodied in Rushdie's oeuvre of work which, like gothic novels, is marked by the distinct quality of syncretism. With a multitude of narrative registers, Rushdie's novels embody the problem of genre-making and crossing genre boundaries. Rushdie's works are hybrid in their style and genre categorisations because their narrative traverses amongst different genres, including comic, tragic, mythic, epic, and gothic.

The relationship between Home and the fragmented Self is a thematic thread that ties the Postcolonial to the Gothic. In gothic novels, this theme manifests itself in the trope of the haunted house. Writers like Salman Rushdie, writing about alienation and Otherness resulting from the loss of a home, resort to the use of the gothic register. Consider Rushdie's use of the gothic register in his essay "Step Across This Line" (2002). Meditating about the inherent human urge to cross frontiers, both physical and imaginary, Rushdie traces the evolution of life from the sea to the land, wondering what motivated the *proto creatures* to make this leap of faith. Rushdie writes:

> As we emerge from amniotic fluid, from the liquid universe of the womb, we, too, discover that we can breathe; we, too, leave behind a kind of water world to become denizens of earth and air ... we are frontier-crossing beings. We know this by the stories we tell ourselves; for we are story-telling *animals*, too. There is a story about a

> mermaid, a *half-and-half creature*, who gave up her *fishy half* for the love of a man. Was that it, then? We allow ourselves to wonder. Was that the primal urge? (76)

Rushdie's description of human birth as frontier crossing is reminiscent of the monster's creation by Victor Frankenstein in his laboratory (an artificial womb) in the novel *Frankenstein* (1818) by Mary Shelley. I argue that Rushdie's use of the Frankensteinian myth and repetitive description of humanity in an animalistic vocabulary displays the ease with which the gothic blends itself to the postcolonial theme of alterity.

The influence of Shelley's novel on the subsequent literary works is undeniable as writers across continents and generations have used Shelley's Frankensteinian myth when writing about alienation, Otherness, and Selfhood. Essentially, the Frankensteinian myth is about frontier crossing: the creation of the monster is the frontier crossing moment of humanity into alterity and a recognition of its own Self as opposed to the Other. The Frankensteinian myth is universal and has existed in different traditions and renditions. The mermaid crossing the water frontier for unavailed love, Satan crossing the frontier of heaven to go into the Garden of Eden, Prometheus crossing the frontier of Olympus to give fire to humankind are various examples of monstrosity and violence being unleashed upon frontier crossing. The frontier does not only exist outside in the form of borders, but the identification with a Self also creates a frontier that guards it against the Other, Rushdie writes:

> The frontier is an elusive line, visible and invisible, physical and metaphorical, amoral, and moral…. To cross a frontier is to be transformed…. At the frontier, there has always been the threat, or, for a decadent culture, even the promise of the barbarians. [Frederick Jackson] Turner [in his seminal essay *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*] characterizes the frontier as "the meeting point between savagery and civilization," … the frontier both shapes our character and tests our mettle. I hope we pass the test. (105)

This idea of a frontier being a dangerous space that is in a limbo state recurs in "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" (1996) by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen. In his thesis, Cohen postulates that the monster exists at the frontier and policies that boundary it (12). A postcolonial reading of Cohen's thesis is that the frontier is the space that is monstrous to the coloniser because it represents what is unknown, unfamiliar, and foreign. The frontier is also a space where cultural and racial anxieties are projected and manifested in the form of violence and fortification of the land and the Self.

Impossible Genre-Making

Gothic scholarship situates the birth of the gothic novel within a spatiotemporal specificity, attaching a Europeanness to the genre. However, being a monstrous genre that embodies and feeds off an imaginary excessiveness, Gothic transgresses its Law of Genre by redefining the threshold and problematising the binary of inside/outside. The paradoxical openness, combined with the encapsulating tendencies of Gothic, makes it an intriguing site for Genre Studies. It is by employing a negative aesthetic and provoking the reader with convoluted plotlines, gory scenes, and bloodshed that Gothic evokes normativity and invokes the Law of Genre.

Jacques Derrida, in "The Law of Genre" (1980) expounds on the ontology of genre to argue that in defining itself against the contamination from outside, any genre is encroached by new forms that get legitimised and naturalised by its absorption into that genre. Incorporating the dirt and outlaw in the genre upsets the Law of Genre, but it also reproduces and affirms its own laws in that act of transgression. Postcolonial Gothic and Imperial Gothic are exemplars born from the Gothic transgression into other genres.

In granting geographical appropriation, Postcolonial, like Gothic, risks drawing arbitrary boundaries. Postcolonial criticism is torn and sustained by debates about genre-making. For instance, does postcolonialism restrict itself to studying historical colonisation in the form of political dominance, or does it include studying neo-imperialism in the form of economic subjugation, like the United States unfair trade with Latin America? How can works written during colonial rule, like Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) (written while Nigeria was still colonised), be classified as Postcolonial? Does Postcolonialism enumerate the experience of economic colonisation that exists in a supposedly postcolonial world? What substrata of American literature is more postcolonial—the Native American literature written in the spirit of protest to preserve a rich cultural heritage or the canonical American works that contours the formation of American national identity in juxtaposition to England? The debatable definition and the arbitrary boundaries of the Gothic and Postcolonial open up space for hybridisation of these genres. Perhaps, the difficulty of what to include (and simultaneously exclude) in the canon of postcolonial literature makes Postcolonial genre-making difficult and open to cross-genres transgressions.

Postcolonial Gothic Studies

Two pioneering texts that have consciously or unconsciously informed the developing body of the Postcolonial Gothic criticism are Patrick Brantlinger's *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism 1830–1914* (1988) and *In Frankenstein's Shadow* (1987) by Chris Baldick. However,

recent Postcolonial Gothic criticism is marked by an avant-garde approach that veers off from the spatiotemporal specificity and intertextuality of Brantlinger and Baldick, respectively. The collection of essays, *Empire and Gothic: Politics of Genres* (2003), edited by Andrew Smith and William Hughes, exemplifies the intersection of Gothic and Postcolonial. The book is truly a hybridised work of Postcolonial Gothic, written by scholars from across the globe, concerning various issues, a collective project displaying the juncture of Postcolonial meeting the Gothic.

In the introduction to *Empire and Gothic,* Smith and Hughes tangentially link Gothic and Postcolonial Studies as sharing a common interest in challenging the post-Enlightenment notions of rationality. Enlightenment's obsession with racial taxonomies and hierarchies underpins colonialism as it was used by colonisers to justify colonisation. Smith and Hughes write:

> The Gothic use of non-human and ab-human figures such as vampires, ghosts and monsters of various kinds is calculated to challenge the dominant humanist discourse, and thus becomes, a literary form to which postcolonial writers are drawn, as well as constituting a literary form which can be read through postcolonial ideas. (2)

Gothic feeds on the inherent impossibilities of taxonomies to narrate stories about vampires and monsters—those beings that are on the edge or the other side of normative. Indulging in Jungian analysis, I argue that the creative urge of hybridising Gothic with Postcolonial Studies to create the portmanteau Postcolonial Gothic is a move towards Individuation. The fuzzy and ever-expanding boundaries of what truly counts as Gothic and Postcolonial texts remain debatable. However, if the Postcolonial and Gothic Self are inherently unstable, then can there be a unity achieved from fusing the two into Postcolonial Gothic? This Individuation of Postcolonial and Gothic into Postcolonial Gothic can be conceptualised as a resolution of the torn selves into a well-functioning whole: a yearning actualised by a form of hybridity and monstrosity.

Gothic Trope: The Haunted House

Having addressed Postcolonial Gothic's emergence, I now move onto the analysis of the gothic trope: the haunted house. The invocation of the haunted house evokes a spooky, ancient building set behind a scenic, European, or North American landscape whose foreboding atmosphere adds to the sublimity of the house. The eeriness of the house is brought to life by a traumatic event that forever haunts the space as a ghostly figure. This phantom embodies the trauma that mars the history of the house. The phantom feeds off the life that inhabits that space. In *The Haunting of Hill House* (2006), Shirley Jackson breathes an organic life into Hill House, personifying it as an old person who consumes

and has been consumed by the trauma that it witnessed. Jackson writes "Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within; it had stood so for eighty years and might stand for eighty more" (1).

Like Hill House that alienates its inhabitants from the outside world, another classic example of a haunted house is the Overlook Hotel in *The Shining* (1977) by Stephen King. King describes the Overlook Hotel as a place that was inhabited by influential people. This hotel's image was marred by violent events, including murders and suicides that unfolded within its rooms. Upon their arrival at the hotel, the Torrance family is struck by the horrific beauty of the place. Like Jackson, King too describes the house as a sentient being that survives by consuming the psychic abilities of its inhabitants. In the novel, Danny possesses a supernatural gift called the shining, which we later realise is his extrasensory perception and clairvoyance. It is Danny's un-human characteristics that make him susceptible to the evil that is the hotel.

Dak Bungalow: Haunted House of the East

As a motif, the haunted house travelled to India by latching itself to the gothic culture that the British brought to India during colonial rule. It was during the British Raj that the westernised version of Gothic mingled with Eastern folklore to create the haunted house of the East: *dak* bungalow. In her book, *The Raj on the Move* (2012), Rajika Bhandari archives the horror that *dak* bungalows hold within their walls. In the title of the book, Bhandari captures the movement and the travel through which the gothic sentiment reached and spread across the Indian subcontinent. In an interview, Bhandari reflects on the title of the book *The Raj on the Move*. She says, "It conveys the important role that *dak* bungalows played in forever altering how British officers and their families moved and stayed across India. These buildings gave them the opportunity to see India in a way that they had never experienced before" (26).

Historically, *dak* bungalows were established around the 1840's to serve as staging posts for the Imperial Mail service, also called the *dak*. Alongside providing the postal service, the *dak* bungalows functioned as pseudo-hotels for British officials. As government buildings, the colonial rulers banned the entry of Indians in *dak* bungalow's premises, and a fine was laid against any trespassers. However, to keep the building running, the only Indians who were allowed to enter the premises were the "servants" of the Raj, who were mainly the *Khansamah* (attendant/chef), the *durwan* (caretaker), and the *dakwala* (postman).

Currently, the *dak* bungalows are falling into ruins and oblivion due to a lack of scholarly work and public interest in their cultural significance. However,

I argue that the *dak* bungalow remains a significant site to study the colonial experience. Historically, *dak* bungalows served as Contact Zones where the British learned about the Indians and vice versa. Here, I am using the concept of Contact Zone, as introduced by Mary Louise Pratt in her keynote address to the Modern Language Association titled "Arts of the Contact Zone" (1991). Pratt used the Contact zone as a phrase "to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they lived out in many parts of the world today" (15). Following Pratt's description, I view *dak* bungalows as not just a negotiating space for linguistic and cultural exchange, but also a site of horror where cultural anxieties about the Other race were projected.

Dak bungalow as a physical space was a gateway to situate the gothic in the Indian subcontinent. The limbo state of *dak* bungalow emerging from the uncertainty of cultural and racial differences makes these spaces akin to frontiers. For both the Indians and the British, these were sites or boundaries of what was unknown, unfamiliar, and foreign for them. In her essay, "The Indian Gothic," (2016) Nalini Pai writes:

> The *dak* bungalow is a haunted space for natives who come face to face with the sahib, an alien to India and therefore strange in his food, habits, beliefs, and way of life. The *dak* bungalow is thus a place where the most frightening aspects of both cultures meet. The cultural anxieties of both native and white man/woman manifest in the real incidents concerning the *dak* bungalow. This in turn is reflected in the stories written about this liminal space where both colonists and natives meet and see each other as both frightening and threatening. In these recountings, a *dak* bungalow is a place beyond civilization for the sahib, where the British man/woman stops before invading the native Indian habitat; at the same time, it is the edge of a world that is Indian for the natives. (203)

The *dak* bungalow as the haunted house is a recurring trope in the works of Rudyard Kipling. Writing in the tradition of Imperial Gothic, Kipling wrote about British colonial rule in India. Kipling's creative obsession with the *dak* bungalow is recorded by J.K. Stanford in an article called "Dak Bungalows" (1961). In the article, Stanford recalls his service in India during colonial rule and writes about his experiences of solving murder cases in the *dak* bungalows. Stanford also provides a one-liner annotated bibliography charting out all of the appearances of *dak* bungalows in Kipling's works, recording at least ten appearances. In *dak* bungalows, seeing a ghost or a phantom was commonplace, and these encounters were recorded in historical accounts and literary texts.

Alan Shaw writes in *Marching on to Laffan's Plain* (2014):

> Trying to sleep in a *dak* bungalow bedroom could be an unnerving business. Overhead was a dirty grey ceiling cloth stretched under the rafters, forming a nightly battleground for lizards, snakes and rats. A mosquito net was a necessity, if only to protect against wildlife falling from above. (3)

In his peculiar gothic register, Kipling narrates the short story "My Own True Ghost Story" (1888). He writes, "In these *dak* bungalows, ghosts are most likely to be found, and when found, they should be made a note of" (4). While these lines are voiced by the narrator of the story, Kipling is also present, expressing his creative obsession with ghosts and their abode: the *dak* bungalow. Although the *dak* bungalow might not share a gothic architectural similarity with its Western counterpart, the ghostly stories that are written about this space make it distinctively gothic. The ghosts of the dead Sahib *and Memsahib* that were spotted in the *dak* bungalows could not escape to an otherworldly realm but continued its earthbound existence haunting mortal beings with whom it once shared a physical existence. The inescapability of the ghost creates a predicament for the native as now it is forced to live alongside an apparition that reminds it of the Other.

The ghost problematises the simple binary of living/dead and Self/Other by being the embodiment of the living dead. The ghost forever lingers in the in-between space that is the *dak* bungalow, for it connects two *different* cultures. Now people fear to visit the *dak* bungalow so as not to resurrect the ghostly history that sleeps there. The horror evoked by a *dak* bungalow is not just of another race but of another state of existence: ghosts. Upon encountering a ghost, we are reminded of its absence from the real world, and that evokes the uncanny because now we are forced to negotiate our relation to this apparition. In the absence of its physicality, ghosts foreshadow our death. Perhaps this explains why people prefer to visit the colonial churches in India where the Soul abodes, but the idea of visiting the *dak* bungalow where the ghost abodes seems less appealing.

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