

The Victorian Gothic Short Story
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Lecture – 07
Imperial Gothic Major Characteristics

Hello and welcome to this lecture. In this session, I am going to talk about the Imperial Gothic and the characteristics of such a narrative before moving on to the second section of Rudyard Kipling's My Own True Ghost Story. So, ideally the point is to try and look at Kipling's story through the principles of the imperial gothic narrative.

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The Other in the 19th Century

- Mysticism,
- degeneracy,
- irrationality,
- barbarism

foreign is Great Britain

Home / Britain

invasion



Now, I want to first talk about the other in the 19th century, the figure of the other. So, how did the 19th century British society look at the foreign or the other. The other is another word for the foreign something that is not home, which usually means Great Britain. So, the other in the 19th century fiction in the British context is usually associated with mysticism, something that is mysterious as well as spiritual, something that we cannot understand quite easily. It is also problematically associated with degeneracy, something that is not morally acceptable, morally right. So, degeneracy is associated with something that is backward in terms of morality, lifestyle and other associated things.


The other the figure of the other is also linked to irrationality, unreason, someone who is not enlightened, someone who is barbaric. So, these are also the characteristics which are given which are used to describe the figure of the other in 19th century fiction. I am talking about these ideas, because they are going to be also employed to talk about the gothic figures in imperial locales.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:39)

Imperial Gothic

- Late 19th Century Fiction
- Draws on gothic motifs:
 - Bleak, threatening atmosphere
 - Evil, oppressive male figures

*gloomy
scary
hostile
patriarchal*



So, let us see what they are. The imperial gothic is a mode that was in fashion in the late 19th century fiction and as I just pointed out the imperial gothic draws on gothic motives. So, it sources some of the characteristics for its figures and setting from gothic fiction.

So, what are they? The imperial gothic has a bleak and threatening atmosphere, something that is gloomy, something that is scary, frightening, hostile and as you would know by now, these characteristics are also found in the gothic narrative. So, imperial gothic and the classic gothic overlap in terms of their usage of similar pointers to talk about settings and figures. The imperial gothic also has evil oppressive male figures, patriarchal figures, if I want to be very very specific and sometimes these imperial gothic would be associated with native noblemen, quote unquote.

So, according to the setting the oppressive male figures are tweaked in such fiction. So, you can see where the imperial gothic narratives draw on to populate and reconstruct the their own narrative works.

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Gothic motifs in Imperial Gothic

- Brutal Violence, Crime
- The Occult, the supernatural



Further the gothic motives in imperial gothic narratives also include brutal violence and crime. So, there are a lot of murders and other assaults that are carried out in imperial gothic fiction and again the classic gothic cue of an obsession or a preoccupation with the occult and the supernatural is also present in imperial gothic fiction.

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Edward Said

- *Orientalism* (1978),
 - 18th- and 19th-century European scholars
 - the 'Orient', in strong contradiction to the West: *Occident*
- "mysterious, barbaric, irrational, seductive and dangerous"



Now, Edward Said's *Orientalism* published in 1978 is a landmark publication in this context. He is the one who formulized the category of the Orient as was understood by the western nation. So, he wrote that in the 18th and 19th century European scholars

described the Orient, the east, as in strong opposition or contradiction to the West, which is known as the occident. So, the Orient is always understood in contrast to the Occident, the western domain and the Orient meant mysterious, barbaric, irrational, seductive and dangerous.

So, these certain terminology are especially interesting in relation to Rudyard Kipling's *My Own True Ghost Story*, because if you look at some of the ghosts, the Indian ghosts, that appear in this particular short story you would remember that the female ghosts of dead women, women who died in childbirth are seductive and dangerous too. So, you can easily apply the principles of Orientalism as understood by the Western scholars of these periods 18th and 19th century and apply them to some of the works that were produced during the late 19th century in the context of the imperial gothic.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:50)

Victorian Imperial Gothic

- H Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and *She* (1887), both set in Africa,
- Rudyard Kipling's story 'The Phantom Rickshaw' (1888), which takes place in British India,
- Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897), set in Egypt and London.

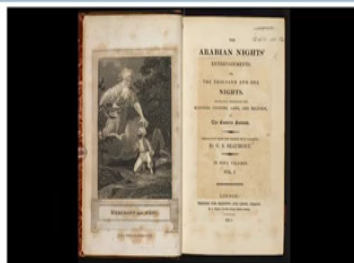


I have some examples of such works which can be categorized as Victorian Imperial Gothic. And they are Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* published in 1885 and *She*, 1887, and these works were set in Africa. So, the Dark Continent is also considered or lumped with this category of the imperial gothic, because of the forces of imperialism and sometimes when we talk about the Orient, all these non-western countries are also somehow considered together, because the cues, the figurative manner in which some of the ideas of the African continent are also discussed is similar to what we see in eastern fiction.

Now, Rudyard Kipling's story *The Phantom Rickshaw* is set in British India and that is also an example of the imperial gothic, Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* was set in Egypt and London. So, you can see all these locations- Egypt India and Africa- these are all colonies of the empire, the British empire, and therefore, all these colonies the Orient as well as the other sports which have been colonized by the imperial government of Britain share similar characteristics in terms of the antagonists and in terms of the setting and some of the subject matter that are explored in such fiction.

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The Arabian Nights



<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-imperial-gothic>



Now, the *Arabian Nights* is a landmark work in terms of structuring and solidifying the idea of the Orient for the British reader. So, I have here the title page of the *Arabian Nights* here on the slide for you and this work has become a trend setter for other tales about the Orient and these tales were in great demand in the British market.

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Orientalist Gothic

- *The Arabian Nights* early 18th century,
- Massively successful
- Demand for 'Oriental tales' in prose and verse.
- stories consisted of: "tyrants, harems, dungeons, abductions, betrayals, and mysticism"

exotic nature



So, the Arabian Nights was published early in the 18th century and it was massively successful with the British reading public who just consumed this work avidly. And the Arabian Nights has as I just pointed out created a big demand for 'Oriental tales' in prose and verse. And authors began to hunt for such stories from all these dark spaces (Refer Time: 09:45) quote unquote, in order to entertain the English reading public, the reading public in the West.

So, what about the subject matter of these stories, what did they talk about? They consisted of; "tyrants, harems, the set of women that these tyrants had for their pleasure, dungeons, abductions, betrayals and mysticism". Mysticism as I said as I pointed out is something to do with spirituality as well as the occult and magic as well. So, all these ideas were explored in these Oriental tales or presented in these Oriental tales for the benefit of these English or British reading public the Western public, who were awestruck by the exotic nature of these worlds, these Oriental worlds or colonial worlds.

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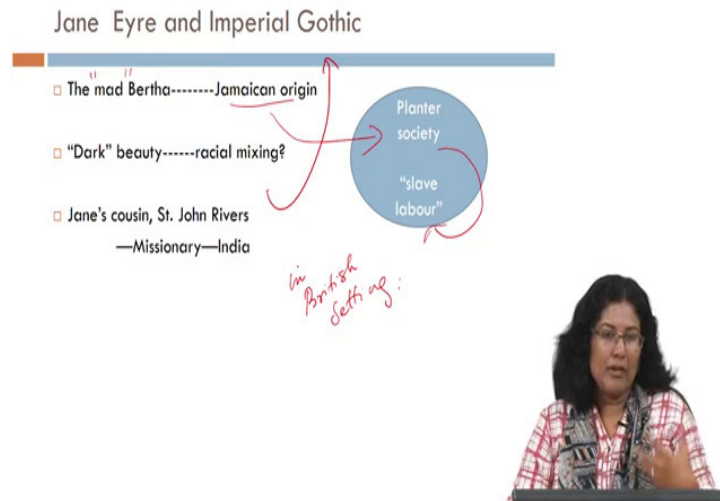
Jane Eyre and Imperial Gothic



Now, I want to come back to the presence of the imperial within Great Britain. So, in terms of the literary context and the best example, an example that I have been using consistently for this course, is Jane Eyre. And Jane Eyre has associations with imperial gothic narratives.

And I will tell you what they are. If you remember Bertha, she is the mad wife of Rochester the protagonist of this novel. And she is insane (Refer Time: 11:32), quote unquote, and she is locked up in an attic like setting in this mansion, big mansion, gothic mansion, Thornfield. And, she is quite interesting in the context of the imperial gothic. And if you remember I did mention that Bertha haunts this mansion at night when everybody is asleep and she also has a fight at one point in the story with Rochester. So, she has imperial gothic associations which I will discuss now.

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So, the mad Bertha is Jamaican in origin. So, it is a colony, it is a British colony and Jamaica is a planter society and planter society depended on the “slave labour” of the natives. So, we have this origin for this mad Bertha, who is the wife of, the hidden wife, nobody knows that Rochester’s wife is upstairs locked up. So, she is the hidden wife of this hero and she is referred to as the dark beauty- she is beautiful, but dark. So, there is a suggestion from critics such as Suzanne Daly (Refer Time: 12:56) that there is a racial mixing to her origins perhaps and again this connects her to this idea of the imperial gothic in British setting. And there is another imperial gothic association in this particular novel and that is through Jane’s cousin Jane Eyre’s cousin St John Rivers, who is a missionary and who is going to embark on a journey to India, in order to spread the word of god and bring enlightenment to this dark country. So, St John Rivers also connects this country of Britain with India.

So, you can see how the colony is coming back to the metropolis, coming back to London and Great Britain and somehow disturb the equanimity, (Refer Time: 13:59), disturb the stability of the home. And that seems to be one of the functions of colonial people and objects in British fiction.

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Jane Eyre and Imperial Gothic

- Inheritance to Jane from Mr Eyre, a wine merchant in Madera
- This wealth has colonial associations
- British Empire: a place of fortunes ; "grave risk to British bodies, minds and souls"



There are further imperial gothic associations in Jane Eyre and that is in the inheritance, the money that Jane receives from Mr. Eyre, an uncle who dies, leaving his entire wealth to Jane Eyre and this uncle is a wine merchant in Madera, which is again a colony which makes it is wealth through slave labor. So, this wealth also has colonial associations.

And so, when we think about all this we also realize that St John Rivers is sent off to India, without getting married to Jane Eyre so, he is unsuccessful there. And Bertha, the mad Bertha, sets fire to Thornfield Hall and she is killed in the fire too so, she is killed off. So, that foreign association is also eliminated, the association that Bertha had is also wiped out along with Bertha herself. So, that is gone and Mr. Eyre also dies off and St John Rivers just vanishes out of Great Britain.

So, all these men and women who have foreign associations are gradually removed from the space, the narrative space, which is occupied and dominated by British figures. So, British Empire is understood as a place of fortunes as you can see in Madera where from where Jane gets her wealth and inheritance. So, it is a place of fortune it is where people make a lot of money, it is a place where people rise from lower positions to higher positions, but it also poses a grave risk to British bodies, minds and souls.

So, it is posing a lot of threat-- spiritual threat as well as physical threat to British figures. So, that has to be kept in mind. So, it is perhaps a tradeoff that these figures have for the amount of money that is pumped into the country.

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Imperial Gothic

- People and objects of imperial origins---affecting British homes and happiness.
- Bertha burns down Thornfield
- Wilkie Collins *The Moonstone* (1868)
- A stolen Indian diamond causes havoc in the novel



Now, I want to further talk about the people and objects of imperial origins. I did mention how they affect the stability in terms of Jane Eyre, further affecting the happiness of Rochester and Jane. The other can be discussed in the context of Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*, which was published in 1868. So, Bertha as I pointed out burns down Thornfield, but in the case of Wilkie Collins we have not a female figure a racially mixed figure, we do not have that in *The Moonstone*, instead what we have is a diamond, a diamond which creates havoc in the novel. So, a very young woman, a young woman gets a diamond as a birthday gift from her uncle and as soon as she gets the diamond her mother dies, she breaks off her engagement with her lover and the entire house has to be vacated.

So, you can see that this the storm that this Indian diamond brings to this English home. And what is further interesting about the diamond is the fact that it has been stolen by an English man, it has been stolen and offered as a gift. So, and it is stolen from a temple. So, we have a Brahmin priest trying to retrieve this diamond from England. So, they travel all the way from India to Britain to get hold of the diamond and take it back to the temple. So, all these are the plot elements which create a lot of drama and an interest in this particular novel.

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The Moonstone

- Indian priests depicted as dangerous, mysterious, superstitious
- The English as greedy
- Mr Jennings—half-English, half-Eastern—solves the mystery

Racial impurity
Racial contamination

Oriental figures.


What is significant about the Indian priests in this novel Moonstone is the fact that they are portrayed as dangerous, mysterious and superstitious. So, all these elements are characteristics of the Oriental figures. So, and these figures are seen as a threat to the happiness of this central female character Rachel Verinder in this particular novel and that is also complicating the plot. Further, Wilkie Collins does something very important in this fiction, which is portray the English as greedy. We have to remember and it is constantly pointed out that the English people have stolen the diamond from India, and they have therefore, brought the wrath of the Brahmin priests and the Orient on themselves. So, you can also understand that point and not perceive that Wilkie Collins is blindly attacking the orient. He further introduces a character called Mr. Jennings. And Mr. Jennings is a physician and he is a man who has who is a half English and half Eastern. And he is the one who solves the mystery that part is hidden here, I have written solves the mystery of this particular complication in the novel. But, eventually Mister Jennings also dies in the novel and he does not have an heir he does not have a progeny. So, you can see his line being cut off and eventually the novel tells us that the Brahmin priest do get the moonstone, the diamond, and take it back home successfully. So, while the greed of the English, the rapacity of the English is asserted and reinforced, we also realize that things and objects and people associated with the foreign or the Orient or with the empire are also removed from the landscape of Great Britain.

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Dracula (1897)

- Vampire—foreign origins
- It turns the English into vampires
- "Dracula is racially impure"—indiscriminate feeding
- "Foreign is gothic"

Handwritten notes:
e from reading the English identity
New racial identity
loss



Now, I want to talk about Dracula, which was published in 1897 and understand the characteristics of the central figure, the vampire. And if you read the novel you will understand and that Stoker's vampire has foreign origins. And that foreign origin in itself seems to already always implicate the central figure as evil. And further this vampire turns the English into vampires it drains the blood of the English figures and turns them into this monstrous creature. So, there is an implication that there is deracination going on, the ethnicity is wiped out along with the draining of the blood. So, that is seen as a big threat. And Dracula is also racially impure, why, because it feeds on the blood of all sorts of people. So, you can see that contamination, you can see that impurity of blood, being symbolically and literally sketched out in the character of this vampire. And of course, the foreign is gothic in such works. So, the foreign is not only gothic, the foreign is a threat, the foreign is dangerous, the foreign is impure and the foreign is also highly hostile to the health and happiness of the home which is usually Great Britain or London or England.

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Late-Victorian Imperial Gothic

- 'individual regression or going native; an invasion of civilization by the forces of barbarism or demonism; and the diminution of opportunities for adventure and heroism in the modern world'.

Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1988), p.230.



Now, late Victorian imperial gothic was worried about certain things. And in the earlier slide I wanted to point out that, while the Dracula while the vampire is draining the blood of the English and turning them into something else, it is also giving them new racial identity and eliminating the English. So, this is a loss, the loss of the English identity, which is greatly worried about, which is producing a lot of anxiety in this particular work too. So, that is something we need to keep in mind. Now, late Victorian imperial gothic is worried about a couple of things, it is worried about regression, individual regression or going native. So, they are worried that the English people, the British people are moving backwards in time. And it was also worried about an invasion of civilization by the forces of barbarism or demonism. So, for example, the Dracula is seen as a barbaric or demonic attack on the principles of civilization held dear by the British public. So, that is also part of this imperial gothic. And further the diminution of opportunities for adventure and heroism in the modern world.

So, they also saw the imperial gothic as offering a window into the lack of opportunities for adventure and heroic pursuits in this modern society. So, these are some of the ideas that Patrick Brantlinger, wrote about in the *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism*, it is a great work that you can check it out, if you want to know more about imperial gothic.

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Joseph Conrad *The Heart of Darkness* (1902)

- Possibility of the degeneration of the English race
- European greed, exploitation and cruelty
- Africa as mysterious, savage, spiritual mystery
- Contradictions that underline the project of the civilizing mission of imperialism.



Now, Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*, which was published in 1902, also talks about the idea of degeneration, the lack of civilizational principles, among the English people. And this particular novel is a classic novel that attacks European greed and rapacity, um the exploitation and cruelty of the English people that were inflicted on the colonial public. And in this novel we saw Africa as being extremely mysterious. Africa is also associated with savage qualities and again spiritual mystery is also tacked on to all these set of ideas.

So, what this particular novel does essentially is talk about the contradictions that underlie the colonial project; the colonial project of civilizing the imperial countries, the countries that were brought under imperialism by powerful forces such as Great Britain. So, this novel tells us that yes these colonial public and spaces are mysterious and full of mystery and dangerous and its people are savage that is there, but the colonial administrators, the adventurers are also savage and also greedy. So, how do we reconcile these two things? So, that contradiction is brought forth in works such as *The Heart of Darkness* and it is also referred to in Wilkie Collins's *Moonstone* and these two works are interesting in this particular regard.

Thank you for watching, I will continue in the next session.