

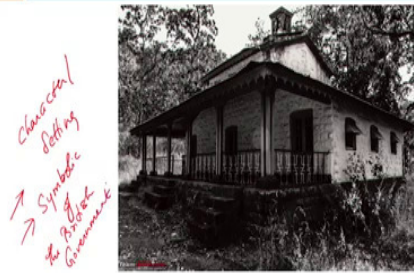
The Victorian Gothic Short Story
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Lecture – 08
Rudyard Kipling ‘My Own True Ghost Story’
Close reading for implications of the Imperial Gothic

Hello, and welcome to this session on Kipling's ‘My Own True Ghost Story’. So, in this session I am going to continue with the close reading of the story and talk about the implications of the principles of the imperial gothic on this particular story.

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The Dak-bungalow

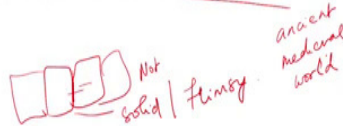


I want to begin by showing you this picture of the dak bungalow, because the dak bungalow is a crucial character or setting in this particular story. And what happens within the bungalow in fact drives the plot of this particular short story. And I also want to want to point out that the dak bungalow becomes symbolic of the British government itself.

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The dak-bungalow

- The bungalow was a very solid one, but the partition walls of the rooms were almost jerry-built in their flimsiness. Every step or bang of a trunk echoed from my room down the other three, and every footfall came back tremulously from the far walls. For this reason I shut the door. There were no lamps — only candles in long glass shades. An oil wick was set in the bathroom.



If you remember the story, our narrator, our English narrator is inside katmal dak bungalow and this bungalow was a very solid one, but the partition walls of the rooms were almost jerry-built in their flimsiness. I want you to think about these two words. Every step or bang of a trunk echoed from my down the other three, and every footfall came back tremulously from the far walls. For this reason I shut the door. There were no lamps, only candles in long glass shades, an oil wick was set in the bathroom. So, katmal dak bungalow is not a very comfortable rest house, it is old, it is dirty, it is grimy, it is perhaps full of bedbugs and mosquitoes and the ancient steward is also not very sane. That is the premise of this particular story that we saw from the earlier session.

And now we are introduced to another important aspect of the dak bungalow which is the partition walls, the walls separating the rooms. If you remember each room is leading into another room. So, three rooms had gone to attach to the room or are kind of adjacent to the room in which the English narrator is resting for the night.

And he points out that the partition walls of these rooms are flimsily built, they are not solid they are flimsy. So, as a result of this flimsiness, every step, every noise that occurs in all these rooms, the three rooms which are adjacent to the narrator's room can be heard very clearly. And you can almost hear every footfall which comes back tremulously, shakily. Tremulous, you use this word tremulous to talk about someone who is frightened-- a tremulous deer is something that comes to mind when you think about this word-- somebody who is extremely timid and jumpy. So, that sound of the footfall is coming back in a tremulous fashion back to the narrator and of course, there

are no lamps there are just candles. Once again this is very interesting because in The Red Room, we saw that there are no lamps, but candles. And candles take us back into the ancient medieval world, not make us think about late 19th century. So, in this context, since this is India perhaps all these technological advancements of electricity have not come into this dark world. So, that could be the suggestion there.

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The dak-bungalow

For bleak, unadulterated misery that dak-bungalow was the worst of the many that I had ever set foot in. There was no fireplace, and the windows would not open; so a brazier of charcoal would have been useless. The rain and the wind splashed and gurgled and moaned round the house, and the toddy palms rattled and roared. Half a dozen jackals went through the compound singing, and a hyena stood afar off and mocked them. A hyena would convince a Sadducee of the Resurrection of the Dead — the worst sort of Dead.

improvised
imperial gothic

colonial worlds → bleak (gloomy → threatening dangerous)

hostile threatening unwholesome

And the narrator goes on to further heighten the misery that he is experiencing in this dak bungalow and he points out that ‘for bleak unadulterated misery that dak bungalow was the worst of the many that I had ever set foot in. There was no fireplace, and the windows would not open; so a brazier of charcoal would have been useless. The rain and the wind splashed and gurgled and moaned round the house, and the toddy palms rattled and roared. Half a dozen jackals went through the compound singing, and a hyena stood afar off and mocked them. A hyena would convince a Sadducee of the resurrection of the dead- the worst sort of dead.’

There is a lot of detail in this particular passage and these details build the atmosphere of this particular spot in India, and it is an atmosphere which is very hostile and threatening, it is almost unwholesome as well. So, let us pick on those words which connect this particular passage with other narratives of the imperial gothic. Bleak. If you remember the lecture on imperial gothic, you would understand that bleak is, the bleakness of setting is associated with such narratives-- the colonial worlds. The colonial worlds are

bleak, gloomy and therefore, they are threatening and dangerous for the health and safety of the English man. So, here he also points out that this is the worst bungalow that he has ever stepped foot in and there is no fireplace, which means there is further darkness and the windows cannot be opened, the windows are stuck. So, this is again a gothic motif and since there is inability for the narrator to open the windows, we get the sense that he is being imprisoned almost in this particular bungalow. So, the idea of incarceration is brought fourth indirectly through the faulty windows which are not able to be opened. And he says that a brazier of charcoal would have been useless--a container-- brazier means a container for holding hot charcoal-- is not of much use because obviously, there is no fireplace. So, there is lack of warmth, there is lack of light, and what is outside of this bungalow? The wind and the rain.

So, again the weather is also not very conducive for the happiness and comfort of the narrator and the weather is also against the comfort of this particular narrator. And the rain and the wind splashes, and gurgles, and moans- look at the word moaned- which is very interesting in the context of this gothic story. Because at the beginning of the story we saw a variety of ghosts being listed out and who are haunting the passageways of the Indian roads. So, moaning immediately makes us think about all those hauntings and the toddy (Refer Time: 08:33) palms, the trees kind of rattled, and roared at the wind. They are being buffeted. The fronds are being buffeted by the wind and that is also adding to the eerie sound of the ambience, of the environment around him, around this particular narrator. And further there are also hostile dangerous animals such as jackals, and hyenas standing about mocking the jackals. So, again hyenas and jackals very cunning animals, if you look at the attributes that we human beings have given to these animals. We see jackals and hyenas as being merciless, the hyena especially as being very relentless in its pursuit of the prey. So, these are the creatures that have been picked out for depiction by Rudyard Kipling in this particular story. And further he says that this hyena would convince a Sadducee of the resurrection of the dead, Sadducee is a Jewish sect that does not believe in the resurrection of the dead. But this hyena would, is so persistent and apparently very convincing that it would make a Sadducee believe about the resurrection of dead people, the worst sort of dead.

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The Ratub



- Then came the ratub--a curious meal, half native and half English in composition--with the old khansamah babbling behind my chair about dead and gone English people, and the wind-blown candles playing shadow-bo-peep with the bed and the mosquito-curtains. It was just the sort of dinner and evening to make a man think of every single one of his past sins, and of all the others that he intended to commit if he lived.

*Hybrid meal
↳ Steward
↳ English +
Native
Recipe → Compound
Meal*



Now, while the narrator is describing the elements that are outside of the bungalow, the khansamah, the steward, the servant is preparing the food and he comes in with the ratub. And if you remember the previous lecture the ratub is the word used for dog's rations, not used as the word for food that is eaten by human beings. So, the ratub, this man continues that metaphor of dog's rations further along the story and he points out that the ratub is a curious meal. Half native, half English in composition with the old khansamah babbling behind my chair about dead and gone English people, and the windblown candles playing shadow-bo-peep with the bed and the mosquito curtains. It was just the sort of dinner and evening to make a man think of every single one of his past sins, and of all the others that he intended to commit if he lived. So, I want us to think first about this meal, half native and half English. It is a hybrid meal and you can see how this ancient steward is able to absorb the English dish and combine it with the native recipe in order to produce a kind of a compound meal. And the interesting part is that the narrator points out that this man is almost barbaric, and a man who is senile, who has lost touch with reality, who lives always in the past. So, it is a contrast, it is a kind of a surprise to see this man come up with the hybrid meal which is combining all the various characteristics of two different ethnicities in a dish and offer it to the narrator.

And the khansamah talks about dead and gone English people and while he is doing that the candles are playing shadow-bo-peep. It is as if its playing a game with the shadows and the mosquito curtains. So, this dinner is a kind of an eerie dinner that this narrator enjoys and he thinks that it is a night that would make one and think about all his past sins. Perhaps, because he thinks that his end is near and he also wants to think about the

future sins that he might commit because something dangerous is perhaps going to happen in this particular night, in this particular bungalow.

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The ambience of the room

- Sleep, for several hundred reasons, was not easy. The lamp in the bathroom threw the most absurd shadows into the room, and the wind was beginning to talk nonsense.

*Wind - personified
↳ Unreasonable matters*

*The Red Room
Shadows*



Sleep is not easy for him because of all the mysterious threats that are running through his mind. And further the room is also not very comfortable. The lamp in the bathroom threw the most absurd shadows into the room and the wind was beginning to talk nonsense. So, he is personifying the wind here and the wind in this native country can talk only nonsense-- unreasonable, unrational stuff, not rational affairs. So, again we can see that the wind is also described according to the author's, or the narrator's beliefs about the local populace and the country. And the lamp is also throwing a lot of shadows which reminds us of The Red Room where we have the shadows overwhelming the narrator, the young narrator.

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Doolie-bearers

□ Just when the reasons were drowsy with blood-sucking I heard the regular —“Let-us-take-and-heave-him-over” grunt of doolie-bearers in the compound. First one doolie came in, then a second, and then a third. I heard the doolies dumped on the ground, and the shutter in front of my door shook. “That’s some one trying to come in,” I said. But no one spoke, and I persuaded myself that it was the gusty wind. The shutter of the room next to mine was attacked, flung back, and the inner door opened. “That’s some Sub-Deputy Assistant,” I said, “and he has brought his friends with him. Now they’ll talk and spit and smoke for an hour.”



Now, it is at this point we have the entry of the doolie bearers. So, just when the reasons were drowsy with blood sucking I heard the regular ‘let us take and heave him over’ grunt of doolie bearers in the compound. First, one doolie came in, then a second, then a third. I heard the doolies dumped on the ground, and the shutter in front of my door shook. That is someone trying to come in, I said. But no one spoke, and I persuaded myself that it was the gusty wind. The shutter of the room next to mine was attacked, flung back and the inner door opened. That is some Deputy Assistant, I said, and he has brought his friends with him. Now, they will talk and spit and smoke for an hour. So, as the narrator is you know having his meal and observing this old man khansamah mutter about the past, he also thinks that this is going to be really bleak and horrible night. And then you know as he is about to retire for the night he hears some doolie bearers come in and he is able to figure out from the words used by the doolie bearers to find out the identity of these new entrants. So, first one doolie comes in, then the second, then the third, and he can hear the doolies being put on the ground, and the shutter of the door is shook by that pressure and he realises that they are going to stay. And he realises that he is also going to have an occupant in the next room. And he believes that it is a native assistant, a sub deputy assistant; that it is him with his friends and they are going to talk and spit and smoke. Spit is very interesting here in this context, because spitting is an apparently uncivilized behaviour that is associated with the natives. And the English narrator believes that he is not going to get his rest because they are going to chat and spit and smoke at least for an hour.

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