
As the main title is interpreted within the book, this is a study of three related topics: the Gothic, Postcolonialism and, linking them, Otherness. Part I provides an ‘Introduction’ to these three topics; Part II deals with ‘The Gothic and Otherness’; Part III concerns ‘Postcolonialism and Otherness’; Part IV provides a ‘Conclusion’ or ‘Summing Up’ to the work.

Khair makes no claim to offer a systematic study of Gothic literature but he does note some of its aspects at various points, usually by quoting other writers. In the Introduction, he cites Jameson’s opinion that: ‘Gothics are ultimately a class fantasy (or nightmare) in which the dialectic of privilege and shelter is exercised …’ (5). He draws descriptive phrases from Fred Botting’s 1996 primer (1-3), including: ‘the disturbing return of pasts upon presents’, the ‘negative, irrational, immoral and fantastic’, ‘tales of darkness, desire and power’, stories containing ‘specters, monsters, demons, corpses, skeletons, evil aristocrats … madmen, criminals and the monstrous double’ (6). Later he adds further lists: ‘strongly Gothic features, such as madness, deviance, decaying houses, ghostly secrets, family crimes, doubled selves etc.’ (120); Gothic language includes: ‘words like ‘phantom’, ‘ghostly’ ‘terrifying secret’ etc’ (121); Gothic novels are tales of ‘“hybridity”, transgression, ambiguity, excess etc’ (123).

Khair also offers a generous list of exemplary works early in his first chapter, indicative of the broad scope within which he intends to work. The genre ranges: ‘From the first Gothic work in English, Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), through all major examples – William Beckford’s *Vathek* (1786), Ann Radcliffe’s novels, Lawrence Flammenenberg’s *The Necromancer* (1794), William Godwin’s *The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794), M.G. Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya, or the Moor* (1806), John Polidori’s *The Vampyre* (1819), Charles Robert Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* [no date given – 1820], stories, novellas and novels by Sheridan Le Fanu, Wilkie Collins, Robert Louis Stevenson, H. Rider Haggard, Arthur Conan Doyle, Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker etc, and fiction heavily influenced by the Gothic genre, such as some novels by Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) or Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847)’ (6).

It is Khair’s contention that the works listed are united by a ‘simplistic fact’: they all revolve around ‘various versions of the Other, as the Devil or as ghosts, as women, vampires, Jews, lunatics, murderers, non-European presences etc.’ (6). In theorising ‘otherness’, Khair presents two opposing possibilities. The first is ‘negative otherness’ (or ‘evil’) and is manifest in such incomprehensible behaviour as cannibalism, human sacrifice and superstition (4, 12, 79). The second is the otherness of the ‘essential sameness’, which is an ‘illness’ or ‘a difference waiting to be remedied into the Self-same’ through the civilising mission which brings ‘civilization, rationality, truth, religion’ (4, 171). The Other is not just ‘a negative image, or a shadow of the [European, colonial] Self’ (13), but is, rather, ‘a conceptual sign, whose referent changes across time and space’ (14). Drawing on Theunissen (and Levinas),

Khair also asserts that the Other is another I and ‘the means by which the I is represented’ (15).

What interests Khair most is the particular location of Otherness. His concern is not with overseas (‘the Imperial Gothic’) but with those texts in which ‘Gothic otherness enters the heart of Britain/Europe, in a simple geographical sense, from the colonies and the Empire and disturbs notions of rationality, meaning, identity, truth, knowledge, power etc’ (72) – in other words, ‘the “colonial Gothic in a British setting” (9, emphasis in original).

In Part II, there are three general chapters and two further chapters in which he discusses specific texts Wuthering Heights and Conrad’s Heart of Darkness, which are ‘influenced by the Gothic genre’. In the first of the general chapters, he discerns no less than five types of ‘Ghosts from the Colonies’. These ‘ghosts’ are, respectively: (1) either the Empire as an absence, ‘a place into which the protagonist or major character disappears, or from which s/he returns’ (The Woman in White, Great Expectations and Bleak House); or ‘the silent, un- or under-narrated base of the narrated ‘English’ superstructure’ (Mansfield Park) (25); (2) England or abroad as a fictionalised space, into which are set fears of, eg ‘civilisational/biological degeneration’ or racial and cultural hybridisation (The Island of Doctor Moreau, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Frankenstein)(26-7); (3) English protagonists who take on an appearance of ‘non-English otherness’ (Conan Doyle’s ‘The Case of Lady Sannox’)(31); (4) objects as ‘[w]ords, curses, artefacts, scrolls from the colonies or non-European spaces’ which prove to be much more ‘material’ and threatening in British spaces’ (Doyle’s ‘Lot No. 249’ and ‘The Brown Hand’, Collins’s The Moonstone) (32); (5) and finally ‘actual Gothic others in skin and bone’ (33, emphasis in the original) (the list of examples is ‘almost endless’, ranging from Scott’s The Bride of Lammermoor to William Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom, 33).

The second general chapter discusses ‘The Devil and the Racial Other’. Using historical and theological materials as a preparation for his study of the literary, Khair argues that the Devil was the most common image of negative otherness available to Christian peoples (42), ‘the ‘original’ Other’ (43). He notes that, although ‘[t]he Devil was not always black’ (43), this identification of the fallen Angel of Light with religious and racial others was easily made and highly influential. From the early nineteenth century, as the image itself loses its force, Khair is also able to make new links with ‘the demons of the mind, the human heart and human society’ (49), and still later in the century, with vampires and, their imperial equivalent, cannibals. The chapter returns again and again to Count Dracula (1897), but has room for Kipling’s ‘The Mark of the Beast’ (1890), Polidori’s The Vampyre (1819) and Le Fanu’s Carmilla (1872).

The third chapter, ‘Heathcliff as Terrorist’, begins the move towards the psychological analysis of the Gothic novel and its descendants, not in terms of the psychoanalytical reading of the childhood fears and deep-seated traumas to which the narratives are often considered to point, but in terms of the ‘terror’ that which emerges when ‘that which has been disowned, exorcised, banished, exiled, prevented entry … crashes the barriers’ (70). This chapter begins with Lewis’s The Monk, then focuses on Wuthering Heights as ‘a novel of terror’ which ‘brings the Empire into the heart of England, thus interlinking Gothic terror with imperial displacement and power’ (64). The next chapter, ‘Smoke and Darkness: The Heart of Conrad’, extends
this concern with fear and terror. It insists that ‘the great ‘Gothic secret’ at the heart of Conrad’s novella, *Heart of Darkness*, is the cruel hypocrisy of ‘the lie of the civilizing mission’, namely the guilty refusal by the British to admit ‘the equal reality of the Other … and the Self’s moral relationship to the Other’ (85). The exploration of the emotions aroused by Otherness reaches its height in the fifth chapter, ‘Emotion and the Gothic’, a third general chapter which considers ‘the predominance of ‘violent emotions’ in Gothic fiction’ as a way of narrating ‘the Otherness of the Other, and the impact of this Otherness on the Self’ (86-7). The most common emotions aroused by the Other are ‘fear, repulsion and horror’ (93). (They ‘could also have been of compassion’, Khair suggests, but they are not, 93-4.)

If Gothic texts register, and sometimes narrate, the ‘alterity’ of the Other, Part III of *The Gothic, Postcolonialism and Otherness* is intended to allow for the postcolonial novel itself to ‘speak up from the Other side’ (101). This time around, Khair offers three critical chapters followed by two general chapters. Chapter 6, ‘Can the Other Speak?’, provides readings of *Alias Grace* (1997) by Margaret Attwood, *Jack Maggs* (also 1997) by Peter Carey, and *The Satanic Verses* (1988) by Salman Rushdie. Here Khair finds, possibly somewhat to his disappointment, that what he describes as the ‘necessary verbosity’ of postcolonial fiction ‘enables many things’, but also ‘tends to reduce the Other to more of the Self-same’ (108). He therefore turns to more extreme cases in chapter 7, ‘Narrating Vodou: Some Caribbean Narratives of Otherness’, believing, as Paravisini-Gebert claims, that: ‘a postcolonial dialogue with the Gothic plays out its tendencies most completely’ in Caribbean writing (110). His discussion of Vodou focuses on five novels, including, most particularly, Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and Erna Brodber’s *Myal* (1988). These books take his analysis not only into settings beyond England but also undeniably beyond rationality and scientific explanation, and even ‘beyond the language of the Self’ (108). The discussion of *Myal* is important enough to be carried over into the next chapter, ‘Can the ‘Other half’ Be Told: Brodber’s *Myal’*. This eighth chapter develops a further strategy, drawn from Michael de Certeau’s distinction between ‘resistance’ (defined as ‘contestation of a given system from outside that system’) and ‘opposition’ (contestation from inside) (122). *Myal* is ‘an act of opposition and not one of resistance’ (126), making it impossible for the narrative to reduce alterity to ‘more of the Self-same’ (122).

Bringing these themes together at the beginning of chapter 9, Khair writes: ‘The Gothic, as a narrative of terror, depends on a perception not just of ambivalence but also of opposition and ‘irreconcilable’ difference … *within a specific context*’ (132, emphasis in original). The chapter, entitled ‘The Option of Magical Realism’, in fact, does not see magical realism as much of an option at all. His argument insists that: ‘There is nothing particularly new in a perspective that sees non-Europe as mixed, hybrid, a combination of the real and the magical/fantastic’ – it is a view that goes back to Herodotus (137). Further, magical realism ‘only partly’ contests European reason, because ‘the magic has to be an integral and irreducible part of the ‘reality’ being described’ (138). There are other criticisms as well, some involving detailed discussion of hybridity and Bakhtin, but the claim that is repeated most often is simply that magical realism is ‘lazy’: it does not maintain sharp oppositions and borders (133); it utilises ‘shortcuts’ to maintain ‘narratability’ (134); it regularly lacks internal coherence by refusing to consider ‘the internal relations that not only enable

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all narratives but also construct “reality” and “magic” (137). Worst of all, however, it is not the Gothic: the return of the dead to life does not provoke screams of terror (141); the monsters are not terrible enough (142); the Other tends to dissolve into the Self (145); there is an absence of ‘the difference outside’ language that, even when it was blanked out or registered in negative terms in language, led the ‘European self to scream, shriek, rant or cry’ (146). The other general chapter, 10, on ‘Narration, Literary Language and the Post/Colonial’, in my opinion, is less interesting but, also adds little that is new to our understanding of either the Gothic or postcolonial fiction.

Tabish Khair’s ‘Conclusion’ gathers his main points and continues the discussion of Otherness that he again pleads is different from the colonialis obsession with ‘sheer negativity, blankness or a waiting-to-be-the-sameness’ (158, or ‘non-European Otherness’, 57). By focusing on Otherness in home settings, Khair is able to focus on a diverse range of materials from a perspective which is new and interesting. The study is innovative but there are inescapable methodological problems. The definition of the Gothic extends well beyond the end of the eighteenth century; everything is grist for the mill (except for magical realism). The study of postcolonial fiction provides insights into a number of rather randomly related texts written in English, some arising from and set in England, others deliberately not, and could have gone in many other directions once one begins to explore works that are not set in England (e.g., the ‘other’ in the literatures of Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, etc.).

The ultimate methodological problem in the book remains Khair’s treatment of the Other. Who is ‘the Self’ and who is ‘the Other’ to whom the ‘Self’ is opposed? These are never properly defined. The ‘Self’ seems at various times to be the authors of the novels, the major characters in the novels, and the readers (many of whom were women, and by Khair’s definition, themselves ‘other’). Perhaps the Other is everyone who is not an upper and middle class English male, but we cannot be certain. The term is an empty signifier without meaningful content.

Otherness here, however, represents more than a literary problem: its major dimension in the book is deeply ethical. Khair insists: ‘For the Other to be Other, there has to be difference – and space for its acceptance, interplay and recognition’ (158). This is not achieved in the works studied: the Gothic fails to honour difference; the postcolonial novel fails to allow the colonial Other a full voice. The book travels across vast territories, is written in a sparkling and insightful manner, is ethically challenging, but the inescapable and dominant ‘ghost from the empire’ to which it bears witness is, in Khair’s opinion, the depressing English failure to fully embrace the humanity of the Other and, by logical implication, of the Self. Khair presents this as both a literary and a philosophical problem. Levinas, Buber, Todorov, and de Certeau (as acknowledged on 169) provide a framework for the philosophical discussion but from a literary perspective, one would need studies of the Self and Other in many more literatures in order to decide whether this lack of understanding and acceptance of difference is a peculiarly English failing, or an intrinsic flaw of human nature.

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