

Re-orienting the Gothic Romance: Jean Rhys, Tayeb Salih, and Strategies of Representation in the Postcolonial Gothic

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“Is there another side?” I said.

“There is always the other side, always.”

(Jean Rhys *Wide Sargasso Sea*)

At first glance, the sensationalism and cheap thrills of Gothic romances might seem irreconcilably dissonant to the politicized discourses of postcolonial theory.¹ How could postcolonial texts conceivably benefit from an engagement with vampires, doppelgängers, madwomen or haunted castles? This rudimentary delineation of Gothic commonplaces might indeed seem irrelevant to discussions of the Orientalist theory propounded by Edward Said, but my claim in this article is that the reclamation of Gothic *topoi* for representational purposes is precisely what occurs in what I will refer to as Postcolonial Gothic texts.² At the heart of the Gothic is an engagement with the unrepresented Other, usually a monster or a madwoman, in the same way that at the heart of postcolonial writings is an attempt to represent the Other, often depicted as subaltern or female. Indeed the two genres bear many points of comparison. In particular, the quintessential Gothic fear of the foreign, usually embodied by Catholic Italy or Spain, fear of reverse-colonization by foreigners, and the anxiety over issues of identity (the figure of the double) or the struggle to describe the ineffably terrifying threats to society (the vampire figure) anticipate postcolonial engagements with the Other. So too the Gothic preoccupation with boundaries and liminal states (Dracula, for example, is neither dead nor alive, but “undead”) has obvious resonances with writing which is concerned with the convergence of cultures (the colonizer and the colonized) and specifically the site of this cultural interaction and exchange.

Where these two modes of writing differ principally is in the perspective they privilege; for whilst the Gothic primarily addresses and feeds upon the anxieties of English encounters with Others, postcolonial works tend to counter the privileged imperialist perspective by writing back to the empire from the perspective of the unrepresented or misrepresented Other. What we find in Postcolonial Gothics then, is a remarkable alienation effect of writing the Gothic from the perspective of the so-called barbarous south, with England repositioned as the foreign land. The role of terror is related to this dislocation of geographical setting. Although it initially seems incongruous or misplaced, there is an appropriate and useful role for Gothic terror in the postcolonial project. The terror generated by Gothic romances stems primarily from the realization that what was previously accepted as safe, such as the domestic sphere, a metaphor for the security and reliability of the narrative, is actually dangerously unstable. This revelation of instability undermines the security of the established order. The gaps, once discerned, enable intrusions and threats. An example of this is the monsters in the Gothic, which are somatic personifications of the ineffable menace, and are mirrored by the Other in postcolonial texts. Both Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* are interested in breaking the master narrative of English imperialism. They fracture the oppressive structures that emphasize the privileged perspective of the colonizers and deny representation to the colonized Other. Common to both is the multiplicity of perspectives in the narrative: a Gothic pastiche of voices vamped together, which are only loosely organized by chronology. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the burden of the narrative is shared between Antoinette and her unnamed husband, and the voices of other characters are frequently reproduced in the narration. Similarly, in *Season of Migration*, Salih's narrator "repeats the stories of others in their own words, thereby undermining the notion of a stable truth embodied by a single perspective" (Caminero-Santangelo 10). This shift in perspectives enables intrusions and poses questions about narrative reliability. The stable narrative order is disrupted. Crudely speaking, then, allowing the "monsters" to intrude is an integral aspect of the postcolonial prerogative.

Obviously a complete treatment of Gothic motifs in postcolonial writing would require extensive analysis, beyond the scope of this article. In what follows, I wish to consider the influence of the Gothic in postcolonial writing as it pertains specifically to the doppelgänger figure and to the fear of the foreign, in order to better appreciate the extent to which Gothic tropes of representation and attempts to comprehend the unknown might still be seen to figure prominently and productively in relatively contemporary texts.³

I. Doubles, Mimicry and Mirroring

Why should a multiplicity of Otherness be disturbing to the colonial mindset? Why does the colonial self construct its Other in simplistic, one-dimensional terms such as “a slave” or “a god” (*Season of Migration* 108)? The answer may have less to do with an inability to understand the Other than with an inability to define the self. If we join Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her claim that “the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self” (253), then the revelation of the Other’s identity is—from the colonizing self’s perspective—not a positive emergence of identity so much as a *detraction* and breaking away from the self’s established identity. That is to say, learning the Other’s identity is a confusing loss of constructed fantasy, a “disorientation” (literally, a loss of the east). The colonizer’s identity is distinct from—but ultimately impossible without—a clear conception of what constitutes the colonized Other. Accordingly, the dispersal of identities that occurs when characters are doubled is troubling because it problematizes the identity of the “domesticated Other,” making multiple possibilities available as a model for the Other. If identity is predicated on difference, a multiplicity of Others with which to compare the self necessarily frustrates any attempt at simple one-to-one comparison, thereby hindering attempts to construct the self through exclusion of the Other. Said’s project “tries to show that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (3). But where the Other cannot easily be reduced to a surrogate or underground self,

the self cannot be clearly defined, and anxieties flourish. Let us turn, then, to the figure of the double in Salih's text.

In *Season of Migration*, the primary doubling occurs between the narrator, who is a body without a name, and the named but bodiless (because missing, presumed drowned) Mustafa. Sometime-inhabitants of the same village, both characters are also outsiders in their own home. The narrator's father relates that "Mustafa was not a local man but a stranger who had come here five years ago" (2), and the narrator himself is criticised for his constant absence from the village, with thirty-two days being the *shortest* time he has spent away (117). Both of these outsiders are recipients of a British education and excelled at their respective studies, but they diverge in the object of their academic endeavours. Mustafa pragmatically concerns himself with economics and explicitly rejects the value of the narrator's pursuit. He claims, "we have no need of poetry here" (9). Yet the extent of their divergence is ambiguous. Mustafa's recitation of English poetry links him to the narrator, who wrote his doctorate on "an obscure English poet" (57).⁴ The two diverge most notably in their relation to women: Mustafa's womanizing is contrasted with the narrator's reluctance to take Hosna legitimately as a second wife because he was "already a husband and a father" (103). If Mustafa confirms the English suspicion of the dangerous, base, and immoral Other, the narrator counters this perception by providing an alternative model of honourable and morally upright Otherness.

As in the Gothic *doppelgänger* tradition, however, it is only when these characters are considered together that we have a complete portrait of the Other, who in this text is Sudanese. This sense of complementary natures is encouraged by the narrative, which draws attention to the explicit doubling. The narrator wonders, "was it likely that what had happened to Mustafa Sa'eed could have happened to me? He had said that he was a lie, so was I also a lie?" (49). Mustafa is decisive from an early age and claims the decision to go to school as his own choice: "This was a turning-point in my life. It was the first decision I had taken of my own free will" (21). The narrator, by contrast, is not only acutely aware of his indecisiveness, but meditates on it with specific reference to his double. "I begin from where Mustafa Sa'eed had left off," he muses,

“[y]et he at least made a choice, while I have chosen nothing” (*SM* 134). The narrator’s increasingly profound relationship to Mustafa takes on a teleological sense of completion as the text progresses; the narrator is drawn to Mustafa like Marlow to Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* culminating in the narrator’s conflation of Mustafa and himself upon opening the secret room:⁵

I struck a match. The light exploded on my eyes and out of the darkness there emerged a frowning face with pursed lips that I knew but could not place. I moved towards it with hate in my heart. It was my adversary Mustafa Sa’eed. The face grew a neck, the neck two shoulders and a chest, then a trunk and two legs, and I found myself standing face to face with myself. This is not Mustafa Sa’eed—it’s a picture of me frowning at my face from a mirror. (135)

This literal and metaphorical doubling of Mustafa and the narrator enables a psychological exploration of the narrator’s identity in which Mustafa figures as his debauched, decisive, and active side.⁶ It would first seem that the narrator’s identification with Mustafa, which is made explicit in this scene, entails the narrator subconsciously projecting the Id onto the figure of the Other, which is consequently reduced to a surface or site for projection. The narrator thereby engages with his darker self, with the *idea* of Mustafa as a veritable mirror serving to facilitate this exploration.

The narrator’s desire to follow Mustafa is precisely a desire for a mirror in which he can see his darker self, not a desire for Mustafa *qua* Mustafa (else the quest would have ended with Mustafa’s physical demise early in the text). In Franz Kafka’s formulation, “the object of desire is the universe in the form of him who, in the embrace, is the mirror in which we ourselves are reflected” (99). The narrator is engrossed in the reflection of himself that Mustafa produces, thus Mustapha is more desirable in his role as the instrument of production. Throughout the text Mustafa is depicted as highly aware of the empowering potential of his mirroring-function, and he exploits it to conquer British women by encouraging them to use him as a surface onto which they can project their

own unconscious desires of the self-consolidating domesticated Other. But the narrator's objectification or distantiation of Mustafa as mirror is quite overtly linked to an overarching anxiety that the reflected image may have an intimate relationship with the subject and that the mirror *reflects* the subject himself. Hence even though he is not a womanizer, the narrator, in his desire for Hosna, sees a trace of Mustafa in himself. Significantly, the narrator resists the Mustafa-like aspects of his own identity, and struggles to extricate himself from Mustafa's world precisely because he already recognizes himself as having become a part of Mustafa. "Mustafa Sa'eed has, against my will, become a part of my world," he laments (50). The narrator is eventually able to distinguish between the aspects of his Id that are projected onto Mustafa-as-canvas, and the aspects of Mustafa's own nature which the narrator finds objectionable and does not recognize in himself (or actively attempts to purge from himself). In the narrator's divergences from Mustafa, we see a step beyond simple identification and mirroring. Here, the narrator attempts to simultaneously represent and comprehend Mustafa. His comprehension, of course, remaining closely linked to his identification with mustapha. The trope of the double facilitates greater psychological exploration of the Other inasmuch as it allows for the proliferation of Other identities. This proliferation thereby dismisses the notion of homogeneity amongst the Other by clearly depicting how two Others can respond differently to identical situations though they are linked in some way. The links between the men are as important as the differences I have already stressed; the similarities show that the Other is capable of the same troubled self-reflexivity that characterizes Western or European protagonists.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where the author's response to *Jane Eyre* entails greater focus on a single character (Antoinette/Bertha). The effect of doubling is a dilution of the self as Antoinette's identity is divided between various doppelgängers in anticipation of Bertha's complete loss of identity in Brontë's text. Antoinette's doubling with Annette, for example, means that the madness that was seen as an integral and defining aspect of Bertha's character is revealed to have been shared by her mother too: "Look the crazy girl, you crazy like your mother.... She

have eyes like zombie and you have eyes like zombie too,” taunts the bully-girl on Antoinette’s way to the convent (Rhys 41–42). Antoinette’s childhood double, Tia, further dilutes Antoinette’s sense of self when she takes her clothes and by extension, her identity. Tia is an external projection of Antoinette’s self; she is the active and powerful double that Antoinette wishes she could emulate, “fires always lit for her, sharp stones did not hurt her bare feet, I never saw her cry” (Rhys 20). Tia-as-doppelgänger continues to haunt Antoinette even at Thornfield Hall, where Antoinette has her premonition of burning down the house:

Tia was there. She beckoned to me and when I hesitated, she laughed. I heard her say, You frightened? And I heard the man’s voice, Bertha! Bertha! All this I saw and heard in a fraction of a second. And the sky so red. Someone screamed and I thought, *Why did I scream?* I called “Tia!” and jumped and woke. (155)

Tia’s presence in this last dream is explicable in terms of a yearning, on Antoinette’s part, to return to her childhood innocence and a renewed desire to embody Tia’s strength and independence. Even as she contemplates the ultimate act of will—self-annihilation—Antoinette is keenly aware of the psychological traits she lacks.

Just as important as what her doubles take from her is what Antoinette loses herself. Throughout the text, she is gradually distanced from herself until she finally becomes her own Other, Bertha. The process starts at least as early as Antoinette’s time in the convent, where she cannot see herself because there is “no looking-glass in the dormitory” (46). This divorce from self is developed further during her analogous confinement in Thornfield Hall:

There is no looking-glass here and I don’t know what I am like now. I remember watching myself brush my hair and how my eyes looked back at me. The girl I saw was myself yet not quite myself. Long ago when I was a child and very lonely I tried to kiss her. But the glass was between us—hard, cold and misted over with my breath. Now they have taken everything away. (147)

Her transformation culminates when Antoinette finally does glimpse herself in a mirror, unexpectedly: "It was then that I saw her—the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her" (154). In this moment of forced recognition, Rhys "makes Antoinette see her *self* as her Other, Brontë's Bertha ... the so-called ghost in 'Thornfield Hall'" (Spivak 250). So weakened and deteriorated is Antoinette's identity by the novel's end that there is not even an Antoinette to see in the mirror, only Bertha remains. Under the pressure exerted by the Rochester-figure, Antoinette has been reborn as the Bertha-figure. She is forced to recognize herself as she is perceived, and in the process is forced to abandon her own conception of her identity that she had previously held as an accurate, inviolable truth. M. Guy Thompson describes this splitting in psychoanalytic terms:

After the formation of the ego—which Lacan refers to as the mirror stage—the child's desire will become more specifically narcissistic than erotic, as he becomes captivated no longer by the mother's body but with his identity as perceived, as the imaginary complement of his lack.

Antoinette's forced acceptance of this Other image signals her acquisition of a new level of consciousness and, as it were, a new fashioning of identity. Her new identity is bound by the constrictions imposed by the colonizer-husband it is not one that is self-fashioned. Furthermore, Antoinette's earlier attempt to kiss herself in the mirror suggests a narcissistic yearning for the self which is, of course, thwarted by the mirror that mediates the encounter between self and reflection. Her subsequent glimpse of herself as Bertha reveals the complete loss of her former self, no longer attainable even in the form of reflection.

This Gothic doubling also has implications on a social level, beyond individual psychology. Just as Mustafa is the darkness in the narrator, so too the narrator's own identity struggle is symbolic of England's struggle to come to terms with the outsider within, as well as with its own dark side. A central preoccupation of Salih's novel is its examination of the behaviour of Sudanese Others within English culture: both Mustafa and the narrator "perform" Englishness brilliantly, thus obfuscating the

boundary between foreign and English. They render what was once marginal as now being integrated; not only unidentifiable, but also inseparable. “You speak English with astonishing fluency,” Mustafa is told by the priest on the train to Cairo (24). England’s anxieties about the outsider-within are mirrored by the narrator’s own attempt to exorcise the ghost of Mustafa from his own self: “my adversary is within and I needs must confront him” (134). The fear of the outsider-within is troubling because the perceived threat cannot be identified, and cannot therefore be isolated and controlled. When the Other’s identity is no longer fractured and dispersed, but recognizably assimilable into the colonizer’s self, a distinctly unsettling insecurity develops.

II. Fear of the Foreign, and the Civilization/Barbarity Dichotomy

The Gothic’s fear of the foreign builds on these anxieties over identity. At its heart is a fear that the Other might become indistinguishable from the self; were that to happen, the threat ostensibly posed by the Other could no longer be contained, as identification would be rendered impossible. This is demonstrated in the climactic moments of *Dracula*. In this narrative, the vampire infiltrates English society and it is the ease with which he so readily assimilates himself—mimicking the English accent, dressing according to the English custom—that heightens the terror of reverse-colonization. This anxiety is explored from the reverse angle in the Postcolonial Gothic of *Season of Migration* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where England becomes the foreign land. Consider, for example, the following exchange between Antoinette and Christophine where England is figured as the mythical faraway land:

“England,” said Christophine, who was watching me. “You think there is such a place?”

“How can you ask that? You know there is.”

“I never see the damn place, how I know?”

“You do not believe that there is a country called England?”

She blinked and answered quickly, “I don’t say I don’t *believe*, I say I don’t *know*, I know what I see with my eyes and I never see it.” (92)

Antoinette also relates that “[o]ne hot afternoon in July my aunt told me that she was going to England for a year. Her health was not good and she needed a change” (47). This is, of course, the very antithesis of Victorian Gothic heroines who travel to the continent for *warmth* to recover their health, and indeed, it is quickly reversed with the news that Aunt Cora “is coming home at last. She says another English winter will kill her” (49). In *Season of Migration*, it is significant that the river is “flowing from south to north” (62), an inversion of the norm which reminds the reader that the text is being written back to the empire from the colonies. In both texts, the perilous Gothic journey to a strange land becomes a voyage to England: Mustafa sets sail from Alexandria to complete his education in the English capital (the Nile is established as an important border, a gateway to the north), and Antoinette finds herself losing her mind and her sense of self in the cabin on board the ship bound for England. The journey terrifies her: “When I woke it was a different sea. Colder. It was that night, I think, that we changed course and lost our way to England” (148). In both instances it is a voyage north that replaces the Gothic journey to the barbaric, Catholic south, and England becomes the feared and unknown country.

The effect of this reversal of destination and origin is the recognition that the relationship between “civilization” and “England,” or between “barbarity” and “the south,” is only relative. The real binary opposition is that between the “familiar” and the “unknown.” This divergence of perceptions is neatly encapsulated in the exchange between Antoinette and her husband in which the fairytale-qualities of their respective homelands are debated:

“Is it true,” she said, “that England is like a dream? Because one of my friends who married an Englishman wrote and told me so. She said this place London is like a cold dark dream sometimes. I want to wake up.”

“Well,” I answered annoyed, “that is precisely how your beautiful island seems to me, quite unreal and like a dream.”

“But how can rivers and mountains and the sea be unreal?”

“And how can millions of people, their houses and their streets be unreal?”

“More easily, she said, ‘much more easily. Yes a big city must be like a dream.’”

“No, this is unreal and like a dream,” I thought. (67)

Clearly neither country is a mere dream, but they are so far divorced from the speakers’ realms of familiarity as to be virtually unfathomable. The importance placed upon geographical location, and the arbitrary, over-determined meanings attached to geography, are a focus of both these texts. Mustafa is extremely perceptive when he observes that Isabella “gazed hard and long at me as though seeing me as a symbol rather than reality” (43). To the English women, Mustafa is precisely a symbol of the exotic south, and it is the Orientalized figure, not the specific man behind it, that occasions their fascination with him. Mustafa relates that for Sheila Greenwood, it “was my world, so novel to her, that attracted her” (35), whilst Ann Hammond “yearned for tropical climes, cruel suns, purple horizons. In her eyes I was a symbol of all her hankering” (30). Mustafa’s perpetuation of their Orientalized fantasies enables him to take advantage of these women: “I deceived her, seducing her by telling her that we would marry and that our marriage would be a bridge between north and south” (68). Caminero-Santangelo meditates further on this point, noting that Salih “represents those who assume an essential identity between people and landscape as being both naïve and dangerous. Mustafa and the women he seduces contribute to their own tragedies by identifying individuals with the heat of their native South or the cold of their native North” (28).

Through the characters’ self-reflexive awareness of how others perceive them, and by offering the reader an insight into the alternative behaviours of these characters, beyond the roles prescribed for them by Orientalist discourse, both Salih and Rhys expose the independence of people from their land instead of consolidating the association. In so doing, postcolonial concerns are introduced to an otherwise Gothic prejudice. Caminero-Santangelo states, “by challenging the connection between identity and landscape, the novel implies that instead of assuming an essential commonality based on place and race, it might be more fruitful to identify common interests as determined by struggle and oppression” (29). Accordingly, Mustafa’s reflections could well serve as an

epigraph for both texts: “Just because a man has been created on the Equator some mad people regard him as a slave, others as a god” (108).

With England now positioned as the foreign land, the vampire-figure as marginalized Other is given the rare opportunity of a voice and access to self-representation in these Postcolonial Gothics. The vampiric metaphors of conquest, sexual violence, infection, pollution, and invasion are ubiquitous in Salih’s text, but are used for distinctly ironic purposes, to emphasise the plight of the Orient as it has been Othered by the West. Mustafa inverts usual expectations of northern conquerors and instead evokes the Moorish conquest of Spain, when he announces: “I have come to you as a conqueror” (60) and “I, over and above everything else, am a colonizer, I am the intruder whose fate must be decided” (94). He further insists that he is “the invader who had come from the South” (160). The objects of his conquest are clearly the English women he seduces, and he notably describes his sexual encounters in the rhetoric of vampiric sex: “I would do everything possible to entice a woman to my bed. Then I would go after some new prey” (30). The public prosecutor, Sir Arthur Higgins, is even reported to “draw a terrible picture of a *werewolf* who had been the reason for two girls committing suicide, had wrecked the life of a married woman and killed his own wife” (32, emphasis added). So too, the notion of infection and pollution typically associated with the vampire figure is specifically evoked in Mustafa’s own accounts: “You, my lady, may not know, but you—like Carnarvon when he entered Tutankhamen’s tomb—have been infected with a deadly disease which has come from you know not where and which will bring about your destruction, be it sooner or later” (39).

But in the process of depicting Mustafa as a vampiric Other, Salih draws attention to fundamental parallels between this vampiric invasion of England and colonial invasions of the Orient. It is not any monstrosity as such that is cited as the cause of Mustafa’s predatory traits, but rather an ambition to inflict his own colonial desires (clearly analogous to those of the British) onto the country in which he is an intruder:

While in England, Mustafa wages a kind of imperial campaign against British women by seducing and discarding them. He regards his sexual conquests both as a form of reverse coloniza-

tion and as a means of anti-colonial resistance, bragging.... "I'll liberate Africa with my penis." (Caminero-Santangelo 15)

It need hardly be noted that these desires are deemed legitimate when in the context of European colonization of the Orient; where the British colonizers mirror the vampire-figure. The basis on which the English women are apparently attracted to Mustafa is also a supremely ironic inversion: "It is an attraction formed from the very principles of the Eurocentric desire to conquer, control, and civilize other nations and cultures" (Krishnan 11). Mustafa is a kind of colonizing *homme fatale*, a curious figure who represents "the fatal attraction of the mysterious East," a seductive vampire whose sexual violence is impossible to resist (11). He recognizes the "English attitude toward its colonial subjects" in his victims' countenances, and wilfully indulges their Oriental fantasies so he can profit from their colonialist misconceptions of the Other (11). Mustafa both represents the faults of the invading colonist, and simultaneously solicits responses from the women that expose the folly of the colonial mindset, which is responsible for Orientalizing the Other. The havoc Mustafa subsequently wreaks is pointedly analogous to the destructive violence and perpetuated legacies of colonisers in the Orient, who violently invade foreign countries, inflict sexual and cultural violence, generate fear and insecurity, and shatter the identity of the colonized society.

Possibly the most significant feature uniting Gothic and postcolonial texts is their shared interest in the dissolution of differences and received conceptions of identity. The prominent Gothic fascination with liminal states, borders, and the sublime is readily discernible in both *Season of Migration* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In Salih's text, when the narrator immerses himself in the Nile, he engages in a merging of identities with Mustafa (whose body was apparently claimed by that river), and enters a transitional, liminal state in the water:

I veered between seeing and blindness. I was conscious and not conscious. Was I asleep or awake? Was I alive or dead?... In a state between life and death I saw formations of sand grouse heading northwards. Were we in winter or summer? Was it a casual flight or a migration? (167–68)

Equidistant from both banks, he is exactly “half-way between north and south ... unable to continue, unable to return” (167). His cultural location is indeterminate. In this state of suspended animation, the narrator experiences a kind of rebirth: “I entered the water as naked as when my mother bore me” (166). After the initial sublime moment of debilitating blockage and transportation of the mind—“Then my mind cleared and my relationship to the river was determined” (168)—there is a moment of inflation in which the narrator’s identity is reconstituted, leading to the reinvigorated exclamation, “I choose life” (168).⁷ For that brief moment, the narrator could have imitated Mustafa and perished; for an instant the two identities were inseparably tangled and the narrator’s path seemed typologically predetermined. However, after the dissolution of differences, the nameless narrator is able to break free from the bodiless Mustafa and reassert his independent identity with renewed vigour. It is a metaphor for psychological development and maturity, for the emergence of the Other’s fully individuated identity from the shadow of the colonizing self; a metaphor which acknowledges the degree to which the two are for a time co-dependent, but which also ultimately allows for the Other to be considered separate.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, there is a strongly analogous passage in which the same theme is treated with greater pessimism. In this scene, Antoinette and her childhood friend Tia enter a virtual “narcissus-mirror” stream to swim. Antoinette somersaults at Tia’s request—a bodily disorientation not dissimilar from that of Salih’s narrator—but turns and “came up choking” (21), clearly distressed by the experience. Although it would be easier for the colonial mindset if the two Others (Tia and Antoinette) could be successfully collapsed into one counterpoint to the imperial self, Rhys’s point is that though they are both Others Tia and Antoinette are substantially different even from each other, and cannot be merged. Rhys’s text resists positing a single, immutable Other against which the colonizing self can oppositionally define its identity. Instead, Antoinette apparently loses her identity, which is symbolically appropriated by Tia, who now wears Antoinette’s clothing:

I looked round and Tia had gone. I searched for a long time before I could believe that she had taken my dress—not my underclothes, she never wore any—but my dress, starched, ironed, clean that morning. She had left me hers and I put it on at last and walked home in the blazing sun feeling sick, hating her. (21)

Antoinette's failure to successfully reconstitute herself after this exchange is allegorized when Tia mirrors her one last time, in an incident which sees Antoinette's one-time friend turn against her and side with the black villagers. As Coulibri burns, Tia attempts to destroy Antoinette's physical identity:

Then, not so far off, I saw Tia and her mother and I ran to her, for she was all that was left of my life as it had been. We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river. As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her. ... When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet, running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass. (38)

Tia's attempt to kill Antoinette, her mirrored image, anticipates Antoinette's own self-annihilation as the Bertha-figure of *Jane Eyre*, and externalizes her subconscious desire for the liberation of death. These events also foreshadow the colonial encounter represented by the Rochester-figure's arrival as the colonized Other, Antoinette has her identity erased by this interaction with Tia, thus emphasizing the inherent risks involved in such exchanges. The failure to reconstitute the self to be reconstituted or even extricate the self from the Other after a temporary merging of identities is an anxiety which becomes fully realized in Antoinette's marriage. After marrying she loses not only economic independence, but her very name: "Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name"

(121). Doubly subjected to control, she loses her maiden name through marriage, and her first name through her husband's violent, colonial re-naming of her as "Bertha." The patriarchal oppression of marriage and colonialism are thereby depicted as being linked.

Antoinette's identity was, of course, precariously balanced from the start, for she exists as she does in the margins of race, and on the border of European whiteness and Caribbean indigenoussness: "Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either" (56). Antoinette and her family occupy a liminal position in Jamaican society, they are rejected by the English and alienated from the locals. She is dubbed a "white cockroach," a foreigner-within:

That's what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I've heard English women call us white niggers. So between you [*sic*] I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all. (85)

In this respect, Antoinette's position is paralleled to that of Mustafa, whose ability to traverse the boundaries between the Arab- and English-speaking worlds means he straddles both but belongs to neither:

We used to articulate English words as though they were Arabic and were unable to pronounce two consonants together without putting a vowel in between, whereas Mustafa Sa'eed would contort his mouth and thrust out his lips and the words would issue forth as though from the mouth of one whose mother tongue it was. This would fill us with annoyance and admiration at one and the same time. With a combination of admiration and spite we nicknamed him "the black Englishman." (53)

Antoinette's father, too, was called "the black Englishman" by one of the lynch-mob who set fire to Coulibri (35). Both Mustafa and Antoinette occupy unusual positions which are simultaneously dominant and marginalized: Mustafa because he is male but Oriental, Antoinette because she is white but female and non-European. In Antoinette's case, this

marginality causes exclusion, whereas it constructs Mustafa as the dreaded, indistinguishable outsider-within. The balance between dominance and marginalization is crucial: the Other's presence is tolerated only as long as there remains a potential to subdue it and indoctrinate it in the ways of the self, for the purposes of strengthening the self. The Other emerges as a source of concern when it threatens to overrun the self and undermine its identity, assimilating itself so successfully that the self runs the risk of culturally degenerating to the level of the Other instead of civilizing it.

This loss of boundaries between self and Other at the very site of invasion has an unimaginably destructive potential in English Gothic romances, but it is important to remember that it is the anxieties attendant upon the entrance of intruding colonizers in an imperial context that provides the impetus for much postcolonial writing. The fear and the very real consequences of imperial invasion register clearly in postcolonial texts like *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in which the tension between Caribbean culture and European values and power structures is keenly felt. The loss of Caribbean culture, debased and made subservient by the imposition of European laws and customs, bears striking parallels to the Gothic fears of reverse-colonization. Christophine is quick to recognize the essential similarities between the introduction of European law and the recently abolished system of condoned slavery it purports to redress:

No more slavery! She had to laugh! "These new ones have Letter of the Law. Same thing. They got magistrate. They got fine. They got jail house and chain gang. They got tread machine to mash up people's feet. New ones worse than old ones—more cunning, that's all." (22–3)

Antoinette soon falls victim to this very law, as is intimated in the following exchange between her and Christophine:

"He will not come after me. And you must understand I am not rich now, I have no money of my own at all, everything I had belongs to him."

“What you tell me there?” she said sharply.
“That is English law.” (91)

For all her attempts to avoid the laws of the invaders by resisting marriage, Christophine, who claims, “I keep my money. I don’t give it to no worthless man,” ends up as poor as Antoinette in a land where European powers and not indigenous ones decide wealth and poverty, slavery and emancipation (91). The erasure of Caribbean culture at the hands of their oppressors is evident in a telling scene where Antoinette’s husband is welcomed to Granbois with a gift of frangipani wreaths. The Rochester figure crowns himself with one of the wreaths, but contrary to Antoinette’s assertion that he looks “like a king, an emperor,” he declares, “I hardly think it suits my handsome face” (62). One need only gloss the symbolism of what follows: “[I] took the wreath off. It fell on the floor and as I went towards the window I stepped on it” (62). Perhaps the fullest expression of the success of the colonizer is the acceptance and internalization of the colonizer’s beliefs by the Other, as when Young Bull insists to Antoinette’s husband, “this is a very wild place—not civilized.... I tell you sir these people are not civilized” (57). The fear of such tacit toleration and eventual naturalization of the colonizer’s beliefs registers even more clearly in the words of Salih’s narrator:

The fact that they came to our land, I know not why, does that mean that we should poison our present and our future? Sooner or later they will leave our country, just as many people throughout history left many countries. The railways, ships, hospitals, factories and schools will be ours and we’ll speak their language without either a sense of guilt or a sense of gratitude. (49–50)⁸

The detrimental effects of the aggressive and arrogant European power structures imposed on the Oriental lands and their peoples, and the consequent damage to local culture and customs, exemplifies what the English feared in the reverse-colonization anxieties of Gothic fictions. Here we have a foreign force infiltrating, disrespecting, appropriating

and ultimately quashing any signs of local customs, replacing indigenous practices with European ones, and effectively erasing the identity of Oriental culture.

Although Gothic fictions and postcolonial texts differ substantially in terms of the sensationalism they encourage and the emphasis they place on affect-driven strategies of reader involvement, both are interested in issues of representation and can be seen to employ remarkably similar representational *topoi* in their engagements with the unknown. In particular, the Gothic tropes of the doppelgänger and the fear of the foreign lend themselves admirably to explorations of postcolonial anxieties over loss of identity on the individual and cultural levels in direct consequence of colonisation. This article barely scratches the surface of the intersections between Gothic and postcolonial interests. A fuller account would consider in greater detail related issues such as the role of women and madness, superstition and “civilization,” sexual desire (both unbridled and repressed, as it finds a metaphorical place in colonization), the relationship of the past to the present, and a consideration of patriarchy and paternalism (and female-empowering alternatives) as they pertain to imposed and traditional models of society.⁹ Postcolonial Gothic novels like *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Season of Migration to the North* act as mirror-images of the European Gothic—mirror images that at once resemble and invert the subjects which stand before the mirror. However, I hasten to add a caveat: as a mirror-image of the European Gothic, the Postcolonial Gothic can be considered to be at once transgressive in a parodic manner, *and* deferential insofar as it still concedes priority to the European Gothic, even though it problematizes it.

Although the texts considered here happen to conform superficially to the Gothic tradition by exhibiting the stock machinery of European Gothic romances the Postcolonial Gothic also reverses the political and ideological trajectory of the European Gothic, and my argument hinges on these deeper epistemological and ontological concerns uniting the texts. It is the more profound concern with the unknown, the ineffable, and representations of Others underpinning these texts which I hope will lead to the recognition that the felicitous nexus of Gothic and postcolonial concerns over representation is not an unlikely aberration, but

a meaningful connection which occurs consistently, not coincidentally, in postcolonial texts.

Notes

- 1 I would like to extend my thanks to Victor Li at the University of Toronto for the valuable feedback he provided on an earlier draft of this article, to Peter Otto at the University of Melbourne for sharing with me his infectious passion for Gothic fictions, and to my partner Jess Wilkinson at the University of Melbourne, for her insightful criticisms and suggestions.
- 2 I do not mean to imply that there is a substantial body of postcolonial texts that necessitates the subdivision into “postcolonial gothic”; rather, that the texts in question use gothic conventions in an identifiably postcolonial manner.
- 3 Of the two texts I examine if I give less weighting to *Wide Sargasso Sea* it is for the simple reason that the Gothic elements of that text have already received critical attention, whereas the prevalence of Gothic modes of representation in *Season of Migration* has yet to be recognized. See, for example Thomas, Luengo, and Maurel.
- 4 Moreover, despite Mustafa’s chastising of the narrator’s love of literature, Mustafa’s own attention to “humanity in economics” (*Season of Migration* 35) draws the pointed criticism that “[t]he economist isn’t a writer like Charles Dickens or a political reformer like Roosevelt—he’s an instrument, a machine that has no value without facts, figures, and statistics,” (58). Similarly, the poetry-appreciating narrator potentially surprises the reader by representing the enlightened voice of progress instead of the romanticised nostalgia which one might expect from a bibliophile with supposed “flights of fancy” (57).
- 5 Indeed, Salih acknowledges Conrad’s influence on his text. See Krishnan, and Caminero-Santangelo.
- 6 Mustafa plays the same role in relation to Isabella Seymour, who had been a virtuous wife until “she met him and discovered deep within herself dark areas that had previously been closed” (140).
- 7 The concept of “blockage” originated in Hertz’s work on the sublime.
- 8 It should be acknowledged that there is actually an ambiguity inherent in the narrator’s words: is the narrator’s declaration an indication that he has internalized the coloniser’s culture? Or is it an assertion of transculturation in which the culture of the colonizer and the culture of the colonized can finally engage each other and create a “third,” hybridized culture? I remain somewhat sceptical about the more positive reading of his words, but allow that it remains at least theoretically possible.
- 9 In opposition to patriarchy (its predecessor), paternalism, with its supposed democracy and shared authority, represented a new set of values in which women gain value—not by acquiring power, but by being incorporated into the struc-

ture and having their contributions recognised. In a paternalistic society, however, the Gothic heroine is still weak and requires a man—the “paternal protector”—to help her break away from patriarchy and provide her with a safe home. Whilst the villagers of *Season of Migration* put their faith in the marital bond and continue to endorse the patriarchal model of society, the failure of marriages (in particular, the tragedy of Hosna and Wad Rayyes’ deaths) implies that the novel places its faith in the ability of female autonomy to deliver a more equitable society than that which patriarchy could deliver. Similarly, in the abuse inflicted by the Rochester character in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, we see an implicit rejection of patriarchal modes of authority and a desire for a new system that enables female autonomy and empowerment.

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