

Gothic Elements in the Setting of Joan Lindsay's Novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock*

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Abstract

This research focuses on analyzing the elements of gothic in Joan Lindsay's novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1967), which has been widely known as one of Australian best gothic novels, to show the significance of the gothic elements in Australian literature. Taking this novel as the source of primary data, this research applies the theories of genre by Stephen Neale and gothic elements by Robert Harris. The data are analyzed by using textual analysis method, which involves close reading of the novel to find out the strong point in making the novel classified as a gothic literature. The result of analysis shows that *Picnic at Hanging Rock* relies a lot on the setting to present its gothic atmosphere. The two settings in the story, Appleyard College and the Hanging Rock grounds, completely embrace the gothic principles, which are: the setting in the horror place, the atmosphere of mystery, the supernatural incident, sentimental emotion, the omens, portents and visions, women in suffering, the use of gothic vocabulary, and hyperbolic phrases. All these elements are closely related with Australian setting, which is the Australian bush. It emphasizes that this novel gains its popularity as gothic novel because of strong gothic elements used in the setting, which are primarily related with Australian bush.

INTRODUCTION

Australia is well known for its beautiful land and historical past. British colonization in the eighteenth century has affected many aspects of Australian life. One of the effects is the emergence of the gothic genre in Australian literature. Gelder (2009, p. 115) claims that gothic novels in Australia refers to a style that has a "genre of back home." Mostly, gothic genre is commonly linked with mystery, horror and blood. It also contains sites and topography such as dark forest, abandoned landscape, destroyed abbeys, and middle age castle (Cuddon, 2013, p. 308). Moreover, gothic novel in Australia has some sort of connection with the nature and appeals during colonization that primarily imply literature with the dark past of colonialism. Gothic in Australia embodies their unique landscape and what asserted in that landscape. In his research, Turcotte (1998, p. 1) explains that Australia used to be imagined as a distorted land with ugly creatures. The indigenous of Australia, or the Aborigines, is one of evidences of the existence of gothic settlement in Australian bush. Bush is definitely one of the characteristics of gothic genre of Australian novel. Schaffer examines that bush is the location with spiritual darkness (1988, p. 160). This explanation conveys the specific features of gothic in Australia.

There are a few journal articles discussing gothic. The first research is by Sarah L. Frith (1990), which

provides the actual historical event and the relation of people in Australia at that time. Additionally, she analyses the symbolic aspects in the story, which explore the actual places of Australia. On the other hand, Chunyan Sun (2015) examines the style of gothic through Edgar Allan Poe's horror stories. Concerning about the gothic elements in literature, the research by Sarah Lundwall examines the elements of gothic by focusing on the characterization of the characters in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (2013). Meanwhile, in 2012, Alarcos, Pilar and Aritzi examine Gabriel Lord's *Tooth and Claw*, Elizabeth Jolley's *The Well* and Tim Winton's *In The Winter Dark* and expose that the three novels above are the center of the contemporary gothic literature in Australia. The connection of colonization and the judgment of Australia perhaps causes the consistency of gothic. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* by Joan Lindsay shows some aspects of Australian gothic such as bush life, colonialism, myth, mystery, sacred place, etc. Furthermore, in his research, Kirby (1978, p. 255) states that Joan Lindsay's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* brings the vulnerability of natural forces and also delivers the strong character of Australia and its laws and spirit.

Picnic at Hanging Rock, as mentioned before, was written by Joan Lindsay, who is well known as one of the best gothic authors in Australia. This novel narrates the mysterious disappearance of some female students when they are going on picnic on Valentine's Day at Hanging Rock. Their vanishing brings about certain effect on the school and local community. Set in 1900s Victoria, the story has become Australia's national folklore.

This research focuses on the usage of elements of gothic in novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock* by Joan Lindsay. It aims at exploring the elements of gothic in the setting of the novel and examining how far the setting delivers the gothic atmosphere in the story. In addition, this research also aims at revealing the specific places in the story that contains gothic elements, such as bush, forest, college and Hanging Rock itself. It hopefully answers the questions: How are the gothic elements utilized in the novel to present the gothic atmosphere? And how do the gothic elements in this novel show the significance of Australian gothic novel?

METHOD

This research is a qualitative one. All the data were collected from the novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, related articles, essays, or books in form of quotations through a library research method, which involves gathering and synthesizing information from various sources. The data are then analyzed by using textual analysis method, which requires a close reading method to examine the texts carefully and critically. Since the topic is the elements of gothic, thus theory of genre by Daniel Chandler and the theory of gothic elements by Robert Harris are applied. According to Chandler, the word genre is derived from the French (at first Latin) that has the meaning of class and kind (Chandler, 2004, p.1). Each genre has its own style, which builds the expectation for the readers and its markets. Analyzing the story with genre theory means significantly know the genre of the work. As for Australian gothic novel as the genre has begun in Australia after the British colonization. Some authors started to explore Australia's dark past and nature as the elements of gothic. The readers' assumption of gothic literature as a genre is to bring horror, death, mystery, and other scary aspects; this public assumption more or less depicts the explanation of genre by common people. To elaborate the characteristics of gothic genre, Robert Harris states in his article entitled "Elements of the Gothic Fiction" that there are 11 elements of gothic: (1) setting in the horror building; (2) the atmosphere of mystery; (3) an ancient prediction; (4) the omens, portents, and visions; (5) the supernatural incident; (6) sentimental emotion; (7) women in suffering; (8) women intimidated by man; (9) metaphor of horror and gloomy; (10) the use of gothic vocabulary; (11) hyperbolic (Harris, 2015). After analyzing the data by using this theory, the result of analysis is presented descriptively (Williams, 2007, p. 67).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a subgenre of gothic literature, Australian gothic novels have been used to explore Australian landscape and culture to deliver the typical themes of gothic novel, such as isolation and displacement,

harsh landscape, cultural conflicts, etc. In *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, two settings in the novel have been optimized to bring the gothic atmosphere in the novel. The two settings are Appleyard College and the Hanging Rock ground.

Appleyard College

In the novel, the Appleyard College is described as an educational institution for girls from the upper-class family. The school's headmistress is Mrs. Appleyard, a very strict and repressive figure. Several students and teacher from this school are missing when they are going on a picnic at the Hanging Rock ground. The college becomes a gothic setting because it evidently contains gothic characteristics as explained below.

1) Setting in the Horror Place

The Appleyard College is set in the Australian bush area that embeds a lot of mystery and horror, as the Lindsay narrates: "College was already, in the year nineteen hundred, in the Australian bush – a hopeless misfit in time and place" (p. 2). Bush area in the novel, as it always be, is presented as the desolate area and does not actually seem to be a proper place for a college building. Surrounded by the Australian bush clearly makes the college building fulfill the requirement to be a gothic setting due to the mysteriousness of Australian bush. One of the reasons why Australian bush gets the image of horror place is due to the vastness and remoteness. To add more to the nature-centered style of Australian gothic elements in the novel, Lindsay adds up the information that the college is located in the base of the Mount Macedon, as illustrated, "...the misty summit of Mount Macedon rising up to the east" (p. 2).

2) The Atmosphere of Mystery.

The atmosphere of mystery found in the Appleyard College starts from gloomy and stressful aura after the tragedy of the missing girls in the picnic grounds, as Lindsay states in chapter five: "According to temperament, between wildly rocketing hopes and sinking fears" (p. 46). From this evidence, it is presumably that the atmosphere in the college is depressing after the accident; it feels like a nightmare at the moment. The students are illustrated like people who do not know what is really happening and find this tragedy surreal and imaginative. Moreover, the novel describes: "If Sunday the fifteen had been a nightmare at the college, Monday the sixteenth was, if anything, worse..." (p. 50). The situation becomes more tense day by day and feels like there is an unanswered question hanging in the air.

3) The supernatural incident.

There is a supernatural incident during Irma's visit to Appleyard College, as illustrated in the novel: "...they see the walls of the gymnasium fading into an exquisite transparency, the ceiling opening up like a flower into the brilliant sky above the Hanging Rock" (p. 147). Beyond anyone's logic, the walls turn into a transparent screen and the ceiling exposes the sky. It makes all of the students begin to have a reminiscence of Hanging Rock that turns into a monster; they imagine that the college would be possessed by the strength of the Hanging Rock to show that it is capable to do the same as what it has done to Miranda, Irma and Marion before.

4) Sentimental emotion.

The terror experienced by the characters usually overcomes the sentimental emotion of the characters. In the story, the young ladies and staff of Appleyard College feel that their emotions are mixed up drastically after the tragedy of the missing girls in Hanging Rock; anger, rocketing hopes, sinking fears, shock, and exhaustion are all caught up, as narrated in the novel: "Sunday the fifteenth of February, was a day of nightmare indecision: half dream, half reality: alternating, according to temperament, between wildly rocketing hopes and sinking fears" (p. 46).

5) Women in suffering.

The representation of young students of Appleyard College in the story is tragic; the strict rules of the college throttle on their own, one of the explicit representations of the girls in the story visualizes by the character of Sara Waybourne, as Lindsay writes in the beginning: "Poor little Sara, she wanted so much to go to the picnic." (p. 7). This poor young girl is not allowed to join the picnic day; instead, Sara is locked up in her room because she failed to recite "The Wreck of the Hesperus" ythe day before (p. 7).

6) *The use of gothic vocabularies.*

One way of Lindsay's expressions of the gothic word is by saying "Hopeless misfit in time" (p. 2). This phrase refers to the location of the Appleyard College, which is surrounded by the Australian bush. The location of the school is described as something that is unusual and unfit in such a place. It is alienated; it is misplaced. It represents a college that prejudices the despairing feeling of the students with the location and the mystery hidden in the bush itself. The use of mystery also appears in the phrase: "College mystery" (p. 56). It indicates the tragedy that has left no clue to help the investigation. Moreover, "college mystery" (p. 106) is also repeated in chapter 9 as the missing girl is found alive, which later makes the College students and staff lost in hysterical joy. In referring to the night time at the College, Lindsay uses various vocabulary words of dark, such as, "Darkened with every hour" (p. 107) and also "dark against the paling sky" (p. 118). The use of dark, resembling the night, could define the gothic atmosphere. Moreover, Lindsay also combines dreadful and dark to show the night-time, such as in "the dreadful dark" (p. 118) to emphasize the mystery and horror of the night.

7) *Hyperbolic phrases.*

The writer has found various hyperbolic phrases to build the feeling of horror in the story, such as "heavy-headed dahlia" (p. 1). In the story's opening, the garden's situation is portrayed as the perfect morning with a blooming flower. The perfect day to go on a picnic is described as "Delicious freedom" (p. 10). This phrase is used to explain the situation during the journey to Hanging Rock grounds from the college that feels calming and full of birds chirping and blowing warm air.

The Hanging Rock

Hanging Rock is an important setting of the story. It is taken from the famous Hanging Rock (also known as Dryden's Mount or, to some Aboriginal Australians, Ngannelong). It is a distinctive geological formation located in central Victoria, Australia. Hanging Rock Reserve is a place of historical, aesthetic and social significance to the State of Victoria. Lindsay's taking it as the setting of the novel makes Hanging Rock more famous.

1) *Setting in the horror place.*

The Hanging Rock grounds have been stating as a forbidden area to the students and it is full of the dangerous creature on it, the head of the college is already announcing the rule on the day of the picnic, "Once again let me remind you that the Rock itself is extremely dangerous and you are therefore forbidden to engage in any tomboy foolishness in the matter of exploration" (8). As this announcement declares, we can conclude that the Hanging Rock grounds is full of mystery and it is forbidden to explore into it deeply. The location of Hanging Rock is high-risk to explore by the student; it is full of venomous snakes and poisonous ants (8).

2) *The atmosphere of mystery.*

The atmosphere of mystery in the Hanging Rock grounds starts when the girls immediately sleep without reason and wake up not as their expectations: "...all three girls were fast moving out of sight behind monolith" (p. 33). This quotation refers to what exactly is happening to them and what is the mystery behind this tragedy. It feels like something big has swallowed them and made them disappear. Edith, who does not interfere with this incident, runs down and asks for help with what happens. This atmosphere of mystery is later described to lead to the supernatural incident of the missing of Miranda, Irma, Marion Quade, and later Miss Greta McCraw.

3) *The supernatural incident.*

The supernatural incident experienced by the girls at the Hanging Rock grounds is the nature force is that they: Miranda, Irma, Marion, and Edith, experience the incident after they are reaching the monolith area. They suddenly fell into sleep so profound that makes them fatigue, as the novel illustrates: "...suddenly overcome by an overpowering lassitude, all four girls flung themselves down on the gently sloping rock in the shelter of the monolith, and there fell into a sleep so deep that horned lizard emerged

from a creek” (p. 33). No logic or scientific reason can explain why they suddenly fell into sleep. Therefore, the incident feels like a supernatural one.

4) *The omens, portents, and visions.*

One of the male characters, Mike, who is looking for the missing girls, experiences supernatural incident during his journey to find them. He could have the visions of Miranda during that time; Mike hears Miranda’s voice and laughs after drowning in his paralysis. This is illustrated in the novel: “...when he heard her laughing, a little way ahead Miranda! Where are you? ... Miranda!... He began running as well as he could towards the belt of scrub” (p. 85). Mike is portrayed as a character that has a vision of the tragedy of the missing girls of Appleyard College.

5) *Women in suffering.*

All of the missing girls at the Hanging Rock are suffering tragically; only one of them is found alive and yet suffers from the tragedy. On the day, Irma is found in the tears of joy over the students and mistress at the college. Although she is already found, she does not remember the accident: “The girl to be suffering from nothing more serious than shock and exposure” (p. 101). Being missing for awhile without knowing what has happened to her is going to linger in her life forever.

6) *The use of gothic vocabularies.*

Lindsay applies several vocabulary words of the gothic to build the ambience such as in describing the Hanging Rock: “Giant tombstones” (p. 26). This quotation refers to the imagery of the monolith that is enormously horror. Additionally, in describing the time at the Hanging Rock, Lindsay uses the vocabulary word “darker” such as in “the shadow of the rock has grown darker” (148). This quotation explains the situation of the time passing by on the picnic grounds when it is going to the twilight time: “The water grew thicker and darker” (p. 85). This quotation illustrates the color of the water in Mike’s paralysis in the Rock; he sees water that is green turns darker and thicker.

7) *Metonymy of horror and gloomy*

The sorrows in Mike’s incident in the monolith is described as “[a] trickle of blood” (p. 85). He accidentally lays down on the Rock and injures his head; he is paralyzed and nearly dead. The use of metonymy of horror also applies in “[m]urmur of distant voice” (p. 85). A sort of trilling comes up, and Mike follows the sound. He sees the green water as “[v]iscous dark-green water” (p. 85). This might refer to Mike’s condition; after following the voice, he sees the water grow thicker, and then he is drowning. Eventually, it is only his imagination and he chokes up his blood from his previous injury and stumbles his feet. During that, he hears a laugh of someone in the monolith. He eventually thinks it could be Miranda’s “[s]purts of laughing” (p. 85). The laugh applies the elements of the mystery and danger in that area; Mike follows the laugh sounds and slips and falls on the monolith.

8) *Hyperbolic phrases.*

The novel undoubtedly has various hyperbolic phrases used to help building the horror in the setting, such as “Tantalizingly hidden” (p. 22). This quotation signifies the location of the Hanging Rock that is hidden by the presence of the tall forest trees when the girls are on the journey to reach the monolith. The area to reach the monolith is dangerously high. “Precipitous drop” (p. 32) is used to refer to the appearance of the Rock at the monolith that is too steep for the girls to explore. Furthermore, the weather and time on the mount also refers to several times, like: “restless windy night” (p. 74). This quotation refers to the wind that is actively blowing that night. Back to the tragedy in the Rock, the mysterious incident is caused by an “overpowering lassitude” (p. 32). It implies that the strange incident with powerful strength is the beginning of the mystery.

CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing this story, it can be concluded that Joan Lindsay has maximized the use of gothic elements in the novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, particularly by exploring the settings of the novel. The two settings in the story, Appleyard College and the Hanging Rock grounds, show the characteristics of nature in Australia, which is dominated by the Australian bush and outback with the shroud of mystery

and clandestine. All the elements of gothic found in the settings build the atmosphere of horror. Moreover, Appleyard College and the Hanging Rock expose the elements of gothic such as the setting in the horror place, the atmosphere of mystery, the supernatural incident, the omens, portents, and visions, sentimental emotion, women in suffering, the metonymy of horror and gloomy, the use of gothic vocabularies, and hyperbolic phrases. To sum up, all those elements found in the setting of this story show the characteristic of an Australian gothic novel with the focus on nature power in the settings, which represents the horror of bush and wilderness in Australia.

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