Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)
A Peer Reviewed (Refereed) International Journal
Impact Factor 6.8992 (ICI) http://www.rjelal.com;
Email:editorrjelal@gmail.com; ISSN:2395-2636 (P); 2321-3108(O)

Vol.14.Issue 1. 2026 (Jan-March)

RESEARCH ARTICLE

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD SERIAL NUMBER INDIA
2395-2636 (Print):2321-3108 (online)

A Comparative Analysis of Satyajit Ray's *Indigo* and Joseph Conrad's *An Outpost of Progress* through the Lens of Postcolonial Ecogothic

Rittick Dey
Independent Researcher
M.A. in English, B.Ed.
Email: derittick@gmail.com

DOI: 10.33329/rjelal.14.1.287

Article info
Article Received: 11/02/2026
Article Accepted: 12/03/2026
Published online: 15/03/2026

Abstract

This article undertakes a comparative analysis of Satyajit Ray's *Indigo* (*Neel Atanka)* and Joseph Conrad's *An Outpost of Progress* through the lens of Postcolonial Ecogothic. It aims to examine the transformation of colonial landscapes into haunted topographies of imperial ruin. Within Edward Said's framework of "contrapuntal reading," the study not only becomes important but also necessary for interpreting how the exploitation and extraction of "Other" land and its resources: the ivory of Congo and the indigo of Bengal, trigger a "slow violence" of history that settles into the architecture and geomorphology of the colony. These objects are considered to be "Commodity Gothic" where the material past of blood and bone is resurrected in the present as active and retaliatory mechanisms of the ecology. Furthermore, the present paper invites the concept of "Plantationocene" and *Unheimlich* or "Uncanny" to demonstrate how the abandoned bungalow and the isolated trading station function as sites of psychological and physical disintegration of the colonial agents. Finally, the research is extended to investigate the role of non-human entities as part of the larger environment.

Keywords: Satyajit Ray, Joseph Conrad, Postcolonial Ecogothic, Plantationocene, Slow Violence, Commodity Gothic.

Introduction

The impact of European colonialism has not only been scripted in the pages of history but also in the very geomorphology of the Oriental earth. The violent workings of imperialism on the "Other" land have eviscerated not only the soul of human beings but also the sentient essence of nature. These transformed environments no longer bear the testimony of pastoral innocence and Edenic purity. Instead, they become haunted spaces where the unresolved traumas of the past continue to resonate in the present, leaving a persisting shadow over the future. However, the buried suffering and the recorded screams of a dying

ecosystem surfaces through both the colonizer and the colonized. In the enduring malaise of colonial hangover, this pain of geospatial voice can still be heard in the mirror of the society where the best reflection has been displayed through the canon of literature. Therefore, a comparative reading of Satyajit Ray's *Indigo* and Joseph Conrad's *An Outpost of Progress* is undertaken to study and measure the parallel contribution of these two authors in demonstrating the harrowing terrain of imperial ruin and the landscape's subsequent revolt. Despite the divergent cultural practices of these two antipodean writers, the characters in both the works face an ecological retribution. Grounded in the foundation of Edward W. Said's (1994) coined term "contrapuntal reading"—a postcolonial approach that analyses literature by simultaneously examining the dominant, metropolitan narrative and the often-excluded, subaltern, or colonial narratives—the research structures itself on the pillar of Postcolonial Ecogothic (pp. 66-67). This phenomenon appropriately synthesizes the tradition of horror of Gothic tropes with the sociological and political tensions of the legacy of Postcolonialism and Ecocriticism. In their seminal text, *Ecogothic*, Andrew Smith and William Hughes (2013) defines Ecogothic as: "how nature becomes constituted in the Gothic as a space of crisis which conceptually creates a point of contact with the ecological" (p. 3). Through this interdisciplinary lens, the supernatural, physical and psychological terrain in Ray and Conrad respectively transcend the idyllic perusal to reveal a deeply embedded material reality of the colonial setting. The abandoned bungalow of an Indigo planter in Ray's Bengal and the isolated station of European trading men in Conrad's Congo are prime examples of this dynamic. These locations are not static and passive backdrops but sites of the model of nature-strikes-back that function as active agents in the destruction of the human characters. Moreover, the extraction of indigo and ivory triggers an ecological haunting that deconstructs the irony of the civilizing mission, leading to the external and internal disintegration of the colonial agent.

The "Slow Violence" of History: A Background Study

The constant presence of Gothic horror from Conrad's nineteenth-century Central Africa to Ray's twentieth-century India elucidates a slow and attritional process where understanding the nature of violence can be treated as the main reason behind the metamorphosis of a simple historical event like a peasant revolt or a corporate and private exploitation of ivory into dominant forces. This violence is rarely spectacular or instantaneous. Rather, it belongs to the category of what Rob Nixon (2011) terms "slow violence," which he defines as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (p. 15). In the context of the Postcolonial Ecogothic, the "slow" nature of this violence allows it to bypass immediate detection and settle into the soil, the water, and the very architecture of the colony. The horror in the stories of Ray and Conrad is the moment when this invisible accumulation of pain finally becomes "apprehensible to the senses through the work of scientific and imaginative testimony" (Nixon, 2011, p. 27).

The Blue Mutiny or the Indigo Revolt (*Nil Bidroha*) of 1859 in Bengal during the British Raj serves as the key catalyst to document the ecological haunting in Satyajit Ray's Indigo. For decades, the British planters, for their own commercial profits, forced the local ryots to cultivate indigo instead of food crops on their own land through a system of high debt bondage and physical terror with gradual and complete annihilation of the existence of the farmers and their property. The centres of Indigo production, known as *Neel Kothis* or Indigo factories can be seen as sites of incarceration and violence where the poor

peasants were the victims of the tortures of the Indigo planters or *Nillkar Sahibs*. This operation of cruelty and exploitation creates an inseparable reciprocal identity between the history and the commodity. In 1860, E.W.L. Tower, a former British magistrate of Bengal, testified that "not a chest of Indigo reached England without being stained with human blood," capturing the human trauma in the material (Indigo Commission Report). This statement also transforms the indigo dye from a simple trade good into a Gothic object that carries a curse of blood across the ocean. In the short story, *Indigo*, the protagonist, Aniruddha Bose finds himself drawn to this sanguineous past. He is professionally a modern advertising agent but an amateur writer at heart. Though he writes occasionally as a hobby, his few stories are well received by the publishers and readers. But he notes:

> For the last few months I haven't been writing at all. Instead, I have read a lot about indigo plantations in Bengal and Bihar in the nineteenth century. I am something of an authority on the subject now: how the British exploited the poor peasants; how the peasants rose in revolt; and how, finally, with the invention of synthetic indigo in Germany, the cultivation of indigo was wiped out from our country—all this I know by heart. It is to describe the terrible experience which instilled in me this interest in indigo that I have taken up my pen today. (Ray, 1968/1992, p. 60)

This remark may suggest that he kept himself occupied so much with the historical research because either he suffers from a "writer's block" or idealize about the next plot of his story. But, on a broader canvas, Aniruddha's intense fascination and obsession with Indigo movement paints his first symptom of the "slow violence" of the 1860s that is finally manifested in his 1960s reality. He is given no room for a moment where he can escape this trauma as he is repeatedly reminded of a century-old agony that refuses to dissipate.

Similarly, in the context of Joseph Conrad's *An Outpost of Progress*, the major historical metaphor of the Congo Free State under the rule of King Leopold II in sub-Saharan Africa can be taken into account in order to comprehend the hauntological and biological reality of this "slow violence." Between 1885 and 1908, the Congo was transformed into a private labour camp dedicated to the extraction of ivory and rubber and shockingly, mutilation of the hands and skulls of the natives. The "Hands-for-Ivory" tax was one of the most grotesque manifestations of this era. Akin to the Indigo illness of the workers of Bengal, the local population of Congo became prey to the brutal and inhuman treatment of the King and his officials. After the release of the eye-opening book, Leopold's Ghost by Adam Hochschild about the demonic and sadistic crimes committed in the Congo during the King's oppressive regime, historians and critics like *The Guardian*, the leading newspaper company of Britain begin to declare boldly this horrific incident of atrocity as "the hidden holocaust," a straightforward comparison to the massacre and genocide of German Jews during the Holocaust of World War II (Bates, 1999). In the story, "The Great Trading Company" is presented as a shadowy and all-powerful entity that manages the station from a distance (Conrad, 1898, p. 126). It is a direct reference to the concession companies sanctioned by King Leopold II. They were granted vast territories in the Congo on philanthropic and humanitarian grounds, aiming to civilize indigenous people, abolish the Arab slave trade and introduce Christianity. But in reality, they were private monopolies. Joseph Conrad himself worked for the private enterprise of the Société Anonyme Belge pour le Commerce du Haut-Congo (S.A.B.) as the captain of a steamboat that later shaped the future of his canonical masterpiece, *Heart of Darkness*. This also highlights the early stages of the "slow violence," of the physical,

moral and ecological rot in *An Outpost of Progress* where it does not kill "two white men in charge," Kayerts and Carlier instantly; instead, it slowly putrefy their conscience, isolates them from their humanity, and eventually turns them against each other (Conrad, 1898, p. 1). Even Conrad's short stay in the company due to illness can be interpreted as a direct allusion to the inevitable collapse of them in the remote trading station of the African interior.

Commodity Gothic and Plantationocene: The Resurrections of Blood, Bone and Blue Dye

In a capitalist-driven society, the conversion of raw natural resources into global commodities is a process of violent erasure. Karl Marx characterizes this phenomenon as "Commodity Fetishism" in which the social labour behind a product is masked by its exchange value. He remarks that:

> As against this, the commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour, within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation, between men, themselves, which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. (Marx, 1867/1990, p. 165)

However, within the boundary of Postcolonial Ecogothic, this method of erasure is never complete. This framework allows us to see the "Commodity Gothic" not merely as a figurative expression, but as a material chronicle of systemic trauma (Lootens, 2003, pp. 148-158). While Marxian fetishism suggests that the commodity hides its origin, the Ecogothic framework suggests that the horror emerges when the material history of the object such as the blood, the soil, and the bone reasserts itself. Sharae Deckard, writing in *Ecogothic*, argues that this mode is essential for "figuring the social deformations relating to the economic reorganization of societies, but also the reorganization of social-nature relations around different commodity regimes and the periodic exhaustion of ecologies" (Smith and Hughes, 2013, p. 181). By viewing the commodity as a site of biospheric despoliation rather than just phantasmagoric trade, we can move past the abstract value of the market and confront the spectral traces of the environment that have been forcibly repurposed for global trade. In the tales of Joseph Conrad and Satyajit Ray, ivory and indigo operate as these haunted commodities, indicating a world where the materials of trade cannot be detached from the histories of ecological and human exploitation.

Here, Donna Haraway, Anna Tsing and other eminent scholars's (2015) collaborative invention of the term, "Plantationocene" is invoked to emphasize that the roots of the ecological destruction—including climate change, biodiversity loss, and systemic inequality—lie in the history of slavery, colonialism, and large-scale, industrial monoculture plantations, rather than vague, generalized human impact (p. 557). This shift highlights how colonial powers re-engineered the planet's geography, turning the landscape into a blueprint for organized plunder. By locating these origins in the industrial-scale monocultures of the plantation, the "stains" and "bones" of colonial commodities become the geological markers of a persisting catastrophe.

In Conrad's *An Outpost of Progress*, Kayerts and Carlier fall under the seduction of the hoax propaganda of the Congo Free State. They are made to believe that they would bring development to the dark continent of Congo but upon reaching there, the real purpose of them which is the ivory trade exposes the failure of the civilizing mission when confronted with the reality of extractive alienation. Shattering the illusion of civilization, they mention: "We shall let life run easily here! Just sit still and gather in the ivory those savages will bring. This country has its good points, after all!" (Conrad, 1898, p. 130). The ivory is stripped of its romantic

veneer. It is not presented as a luxury material for piano keys, expensive jewellery, billiard balls or combs but as skeletal remains. Conrad (1898) emphasizes this through Carlier, who remarks, "I'd rather see it full of bone than full of rags" (p. 126). Thereafter, the line between local inhabitants and ivory is blurred when Carlier comments: "Fine animals. Brought any bone ? Yes ? It's not any too soon" (Conrad, 1898, p. 134). This linguistic shift and intentional slip from "ivory" to "bone" re-naturalizes the commodity, reminding the reader that every tusk is a product of dead human labour and multi-species slaughter. The ivory becomes a "Gothic object" representing the asset stripping of the Congo—a hallmark of the "Plantationocene" destructive reach. The men who trade in this bone, Kayerts and Carlier, eventually become as lifeless as the commodities they guard. Their disintegration mirrors the exhaustion of the landscape they have attempted to colonize. The bone in the storehouse is a materialization of the death they have imported into the environment. The final culmination comes when the station has had a "bad six months' trading" and has very little ivory. Kayerts begins to worry about his "percentages" (commissions) and what the Director will think (Conrad, 1898, p. 147). But Henry Price, also known as Makola, a Sierra Leone clerk, provides a solution and tells Kayerts that the armed strangers from the coast have more ivory than they can carry and offers to purchase it from them. But he openly admits they are "bad fellows" who "fight with people, and catch women and children. They are bad men, and got guns" (Conrad, 1898, p. 147). Despite this clear hint at slave trading, Kayerts tells Makola to go ahead. As a result, this brings about the ultimate hypocrisy of the white men. In the morning, Kayerts sees six tusks on the ground and realizes that Makola has sold the station workers for ivory. These symbolize the price of their souls. They are beautiful and valuable, but they were bought with human lives. Although he has an initial shock, leading to an argument with Makola. But, finally, he makes a compromise and eventually walks over to the ivory, touches, and weighs it, saying, "It's deplorable, but, the men being Company's men, the ivory is Company's ivory. We must look after it" (Conrad, 1898, p. 154). This shows that the white men's ethics and integrity are only a thin layer. They are happy to profit from the horror. Kayerts "trembled in every limb" while doing it (Conrad, 1898, p. 154). This anti-altruistic episode cut their ties with the natives, making them truly alone, starving, and surrounded by a silent, hostile wilderness. Slowly, they run out of their food and the two engage themselves in a fight over some sugar. In a fit of rage, Kayerts kills Carlier. The sugar also become "Commodity Gothic." This is how the mutiny of an environmental object transforms from a silent commodity into a pale, Gothic spectre that reverse colonize them, thus, successfully establishing the concept of "Plantationocene."

Moving towards Satyajit Ray's *Indigo*, the blue dye represents the vampiric nature of the plantation system. In the nineteenth-century Bengal, the British logic of industrial monoculture compelled ryots to abandon food-sustaining rice for export-heavy blue dye. As the title straightway declares, this backdrop navigates the core plot of *Indigo* where Ray prepares and clarifies to the readers that the product itself creates the dreadful atmosphere throughout the anecdote of Aniruddha Bose. Somewhere he is frightened and troubled by the past of indigo from his childhood. He states: I had seen ruins of indigo factories in Monghyr too in my childhood" (Ray, 1968/1992, p. 62) The way he does intensive research on the annals of Indigo Rebellion, as if he is already directed in his unconscious mind to have an encounter with the landscape of Birbhum, the crumbling remains of the indigo factory and its surrounding bungalow that acts as the storage device for this trauma. On one hand, he himself has a twentieth-century individual entity and on the other hand, he becomes a vessel for a nineteenth-century British man's body. The

indigo performs as shapeshifting that physically transforms Aniruddha into the anonymous British planter. In this way, he reacts to the materiality of the indigo itself. Hence, within the framework of the "Plantationocene," the spectral dye and the eerie setting converge as elements of "Commodity Gothic."

The Coalition of Nature: Non-Human Agency and the Revolt of the Landscape

In the light of Postcolonial Ecogothic, nature is never a deaf, trivial and silent witness. It is a supreme and often antagonistic stakeholder. If ivory and indigo breathe with a hostile intent, then the other ambient agents of nature serve as the invisible machineries of topographical retaliation.

Conrad's characters are not examples of classical heroes or omnipotent figures who have the extreme agility and competency to conquer the world. Instead, they are helpless and thwarted at the hand of nature. As the title refers, *An Outpost of Progress* is an absurd and sarcastic statement on the vain attempt of development that colonialism tried but could not succeed. Here, Kayerts and Carlier face devastating consequences in the predicament of the earth. Solely fuelled by cynical and financial motivation, they seem to be at ease and peace in an unsuitable place. Soon enough, they realize that the wilderness is not a place of beauty or opportunity, but a prison that separates them from the civilized life. As Carlier observes: "…the river, the forests, the impenetrable bush that seemed to cut off the station from the rest of the world,…" (Conrad, 1898, p. 127). Nevertheless, Conrad exposes the fragility of civilized veneer when it is stripped of societal support. When Kayerts and Carlier are dumped into the secluded African jungle, their "courage," "composure," "confidence," "emotions" and "principles" dismantle, causing sudden and profound trouble into the heart" of them (Conrad, 1898, pp. 128-129). Additionally, the scorching sun of Congo plays on the nerves of the two European men to create a sense of exposure and madness in the milieu of Tropical Gothic or Ecogothic. To the natives like Makola, the sun is a blessing but to the intruders, it is a curse. Ignoring the reason for the death of the previous owner of the station who died of the sun's excessive heat, Kayerts and Carlier, too, lose their grip on their artificial selves: "The images of home; the memory of people…made indistinct by the glare of unclouded sunshine" (Conrad, 1898, p. 156). Finally, the dense fog at the end of the story serves as a Gothic veil. It obscures the reality of Kayerts' suicide until the last possible moment, making the environment a collaborator in the final grotesque discovery. Thus, they fail to apprehend the rudimental components of the "land of darkness"—the forest, the grass, the river, the mist and the fog (Conrad, 1898, p. 145).

Following the same template, Aniruddha Bose is made aware of the ominous signs from the very beginning in *Indigo*. He is a twenty nine-year-old bachelor who lives a comfortable life in Calcutta (now Kolkata). He is educated as well as successful, but perhaps a bit lonely as he admits that he has no close friends in the city. That is why when his old school friend, Promode, invites him for a visit in his place, Dumka, a forest-heavy city in the state of Jharkhand, India, he takes up the opportunity. He decides to reach there in his Ambassador car. However, he begins his trip by encountering snags one by one. The arrival of his uncle Mohit and his small talk with the neighbour, Bhola Babu delay the start of the journey. While the "first thirty miles" through "dingy towns" were dreary, after that point of time, the environment appears as a refuge from urban decay (Ray, 1968/1992, p. 60). Instantly, he notices: "Where in the city did one get to see such a clear blue sky free from chimney smoke, and breathe air so pure and so redolent of the smell of earth?" (Ray, 1968/1992, p. 61). This sudden yet careful alteration signifies that the protagonist moves away from his modern, safe abode and enters a sphere where the past and nature hold more primordial power, underscoring the pure blue

blood of the indigo riots. At 2:30 PM, near Panagarh, his car suffers a flat tire. While changing it, he notices the weather shifting,

> The cool breeze which was blowing even an hour ago, and was making the bamboo trees sway, had stopped. Now everything was still. As I got back into the car I noticed a blue-black patch in the west above the treetops. Clouds. Was a storm brewing up? A norwester? (Ray, 1968/1992, p. 61)

In Gothic tradition, the sudden stillness of nature often signals that the silence before the occurrence of a supernatural or violent occasion. As he moves deeper into the rural interior, this motif becomes clear:

> I was caught in the storm. I had enjoyed such norwesters in the past, sitting in my room, and had even recited Tagore poems to myself to blend with the mood. I had no idea that driving through open country, such a norwester could strike terror into the heart. Claps of thunder always make me uncomfortable. They seem to show a nasty side of nature; a vicious assault on helpless humanity. It seemed as if the shafts of lightning were all aimed at my poor Ambassador, and one of them was sure to find its mark sooner or later. (Ray, 1968/1992, p. 61)

The nor'wester or locally called *Kalbaishakhi* in Bengali, stamps Aniruddha's departure from the cosy corner to an unknown zone. It denotes the uncontrollable power of the Indian climate, which famously broke the spirits and health of many British colonizers. This is a classic Ecogothic sentiment where nature is seen as nasty and vicious, underlying that the environment is actively punishing the humans within it. The lightning behaves as a literal aimed weapon. The Ambassador car, a symbol of modern Indian engineering, is helpless against this elemental rage. At 5:30 PM, in the middle of the blinding rain, a second tire bursts that he almost mistakes it as a "thunderclap" (Ray, 1968/1992, p. 61). He is now stranded without any more spare tires. Somehow, he manages to secure homely feeling at an old Dak Bungalow nearby where he stays. Still, the inauspicious symptoms do not get rid of him rather they achieve more command around it that is thick with the sounds and sights of nature. In this way, they reclaim the colonial relics. Interesting enough, the petty sounds of frogs and crickets create a kind of auditory haunting, triggering the city-dweller, Aniruddha's brain into convincing the city's existence in an "another planet" (Ray, 1968/1992, p. 62). Just before sleeping, he thinks of *Nildarpan* (The Mirror of Indigo), a famous nineteenth-century play about the horrors of the indigo trade. This acts as a bridge between his waking thoughts and the nightmare to come. This is a real, landmark play by Dinabandhu Mitra (1860) (Ray, 1968/1992, p. 62). This is where the story shifts from a travel mishap into a full-blown Gothic horror. Aniruddha's modern identity slips into the ghost of the archives he was obsessed with. In this final section, the line between him and the long-dead Englishman vanishes completely, leading to a tragic, historical re-enactment of a man's final moments. Controlled by an unseen and enigmatic energy, he sits at the desk and begins to write in a leather notebook with a quill pen. The date is April 27, 1868 (Ray, 1968/1992, p. 63). The entry reveals the indigo planter's desperate mental state. Despite the fact that it is not Aniruddha anymore, in the pages of the diary, the environment continue to be seen through the eyes of the colonizer, who feels cursed by the land he tried to own once. As he recounts:

> Those fiendish mosquitoes are singing in my ears again. So that's how the son of a mighty empire has to meet his end—at the hands of a tiny insect. What strange will of God is this?...Perhaps I was greedier than them. So in spite of repeated attacks of malaria I couldn't resist the lure of indigo…I know I will

> have to stay here and lay down my life on this alien soil…I have treated the natives here so badly that there is no one to shed a tear at my passing away. (Ray, 1968/1992, p. 64)

This is a quintessential Postcolonial Ecogothic moment. The *Pax Britannica* or Britain's global superiority is defeated not by a human army, but by the smallest of the insects of the land. Nature itself is the resistance fighter. As if he forgot to take the "mosquito net" of Kayerts and Carlier from the suburbs of Africa (Conrad, 1898, p. 125). The colonizer finally admits the soil is foreign and unfamiliar to him. In spite of establishing the plantation, he fails to belong to the earth, which will consume him in due course. Having the knowledge of the predestined fate, he cannot escape the greed. The planter's condition of solitude is the outcome of his visceral, savage response to the people who are indigenous to the land. This creates a Gothic atmosphere of total loneliness where the only thing surrounding him is a landscape and a population that destines his end.

The Domestic Uncanny: From Bungalow to Station

The trading station in Congo and the bungalow in British India are designed to be "heimlich" or homely spaces. They are modified to offer safety and a sense of belongingness and cultural continuity to the colonial agents. However, in the Postcolonial Ecogothic, these spaces undergo a terrifying transformation. This finds resonance with Sigmund Freud's (1919/1955) definition of "unheimlich" or "uncanny": "Uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (p. 12).

The trading station in *An Outpost of Progress* is a delicate imitation of an old-fashioned English house that Kayerts and Carlier are provided with to live and survive. The Director of the Great Trading Company views "the station on this river useless, and they just fit the station!" (Conrad, 1898, p. 128). He thinks the station and the men as equally worthless. There also lies the grave of the "first chief" who, before them, came here to imprint colonial impressions but the hunter got hunted himself. The cross on his tomb is "much out of the perpendicular," epitomizing the progress that he claimed to bring is now tilted, unstable and succumbing to the environment (Conrad, 1898, pp. 125-126). Nearby, there is a "storehouse" or "fetish," as the native people call it because they believe the trade goods inside have the "spirit of civilization" (Conrad, 1898, pp. 134-135). It embodies that the ivory is perceived as an emblem of sacredness to the African locals. It can be considered as true because it is the very lifeless elephant tusks, filled with mysterious powers that design the calculated fatal flaw of them. Again, the cross of the previous agent's burial ground has been put to a horrific new use. When the Director finally returns to the station, he finds Kayerts is "hanging by a leather strap from the cross" (Conrad, 1898, p. 160). It stands as a monument to the fact that the domestic space has been utterly reclaimed by the Gothic Other.

In the same manner, the derelict bungalow in *Indigo* that was earlier regarded as a harmless residence to spend night without any worry by Aniruddha is turned out to be the most hideous institution of colonialism, having Gothic implications. This further illustrates Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) theory of the "third space," where Aniruddha's present persona and the planter's past spirit clash, intersect, and blend to beget a unique "hybridity" (p. 37). While sleeping, he is awakened by a scratching at the door. At first, he thinks it is a stray animal, but then he hears the "unmistakable bay of a hound" (Ray, 1968/1992, p. 63). The sound reminds him of a dog owned by a Mr. Martin back in his childhood home of Monghyr. His automatic wristwatch, torch and suitcase all have vanished, making his modern tools

purposeless. He realizes something is deeply wrong when he looks at his own hands. With skin appearing pale, as if covered in "whitewash" or "white powder," Aniruddha who went to bed in a vest now wears a "long-sleeved silk shirt" and calls for the chowkidar with the "unmistakable accent of an Englishman" (Ray, 1968/1992, p. 63). Horrified, he steps onto the veranda and sees that the world has changed. The cottage where Sukhanram lives is gone. In its place is a "wide open field" and a "building with a high chimney" that stands for the indigo factory in its prime (Ray, 1998/1992, p. 63). The uncanny site of the bungalow begins to peel away his original self through its material remnants. Returning inside, he witnesses the artefacts of the room have been completely restored new. He rushes to the bathroom and looks into an oval mirror. He no longer sees himself. Instead, he sees a:

> nineteenth-century Englishman with a sallow complexion, blond hair and light eyes from which shone a strange mixture of hardness and suffering…Not more than thirty, but it looked as if either illness or hard work, or both, had aged him prematurely. (Ray, 1968/1992, p. 63)

Rather than juggling two separate lives, he becomes a vehicle for a split personality, yet he is fully conscious of both bodies at once. The ultimate significant example of the "unheimlich" object is the old armchair. While resting in it, he loses his own temporal agency. He looks at his wrist and sees a time that does not belong to the twentieth century. He records the moment with precision. He writes: "Thirteen minutes past six" (Ray, 1968/1992, p. 64). This specific time links him to the hundredth anniversary of the death of the indigo planter. The bungalow exhibits haunted archive shelter for a modern traveller where the environment uses the furniture and the architecture to overwrite the present with the colonial past.

Moral Reckonings: Animal Agency and the Erasure of the Living Being

Animals are integral to Postcolonial Ecogothic where, alongside flora, they are also treated with utmost importance to articulate the totalizing nature of the entangled hauntings of land and lineage. In the works of Conrad and Ray, the animal body, whether absent or present, functions as a mechanism of moral and physical reckoning. In Joseph Conrad's *An Outpost of Progress*, the elephant is the most conspicuous absence. The entire economic purpose of the station is the collection of ivory, yet the living animal never appears in the text. By omitting the living animal, Conrad highlights the erasure of life that underpins the ivory trade. While Conrad deals with erasure, Satyajit Ray (1968/1992) uses the figure of Rex, the "faithful" dog to mark the boundary between the human and the supernatural (p. 64). In *Indigo*, Rex is a liminal being that senses the uncanny presence of the past long before the human protagonist does. When the unnamed indigo planter in Aniruddha Bose shoots Rex, he does not just kill a pet; he executes the last Gothic act of the cruel planter. Ray writes, "Rex's lifeless, blood-spattered body lay partly on the veranda and partly on the grass" (Ray, 1968/1992, p. 64). Thus, it confronts us with the fact that the colonial mission was an assault on all forms of life.

Conclusion: Narrative Synchronicity—Dissolving the Boundaries of Colonial Ruin

The amalgamation of these two narratives reveals a paramount thematic synchronicity, tethering Satyajit Ray and Joseph Conrad within a shared colonial register. Rather than mere coincidence, the creators and their creations occupy a uniform canvas where the boundaries between the African interior and the Bengal frontier dissolve. Aniruddha's confidence in not misunderstanding Bengal for "the jungle of Africa" breaks down when he really stumbles upon the deserted Bungalow that can be seen as an extended part of the trading station of

Kayerts and Carlier(Ray, 1968/1992, p. 61). Again, the arrival of the "armed men," wearing "blue fringed cloths" who spark the downfall of Kayerts and Carlier, functions as a grim metaphor for the indigo trade of Bengal that subsequently stained the planter in *Indigo* with blue blood (Conrad, 1898, p. 140). This synthesis transcends narrative similarity to reveal the core of the Postcolonial Ecogothic. By bridging the ecocritical domain with the Gothic, we uncover a world where the environment acts as a vengeful archive of imperial violence.

References

Bates, S. (1999). The hidden holocaust. *The Guardian*.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.

Conrad, J. (1898). An outpost of progress. In *Tales of unrest*. T. Fisher Unwin.

Conrad, J. (1899). *Heart of darkness*. *Blackwood's Magazine*.

Freud, S. (1955). The uncanny (J. Strachey, Trans.). In J. Strachey (Ed.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 17, pp. 217–256). Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1919)

Haraway, D., Nobelius, A., Ishikawa, M., et al. (2015). Anthropologists are talking – about the Anthropocene. *Ethnos, 81*(3), 535–564. https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2015.1105838

Hochschild, A. (1998). *King Leopold's ghost: A story of greed, terror and heroism in colonial Africa*. Mariner Books.

Huggan, G., & Tiffin, H. (2010). *Postcolonial ecocriticism: Literature, animals, environment*. Routledge.

Lootens, T. (2003). Fear of furniture: Commodity Gothicism and the teaching of Victorian literature. In D. L. Hoeveler & T. Heller (Eds.), *Approaches to teaching Gothic fiction: The British and American traditions* (pp. 148–158). Modern Language Association of America.

Marx, K. (1990). *Capital: Volume I* (B. Fowkes, Trans.). Penguin Classics. (Original work published 1867)

Mitra, D. (1859). *Nildarpan [The mirror of indigo]*. Bangla Jantra.

Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor*. Harvard University Press.

Ray, S. (1992). Indigo. In *Satyajit Ray: The collected short stories*. Penguin Books.

Smith, A., & Hughes, W. (Eds.). (2013). *Ecogothic*. Manchester University Press.