

The Gothic Double of *Sitora Harimau Jadian* (1965) By P. Pramlee

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates the gothic double of *Sitora Harimau Jadian* (1965) by P. Ramlee through the observation of the characteristics of Dr Effendi and the weretiger, Sitora. Double or doubling is a Gothic motif that is prevalent in Gothic literature, both classic and contemporary, which explores the nuances of the dark psyche one inhibits. It also problematises or brings forth thematic issues of alienation, transgression and the like. Based on the analysis, the researchers gathered that the transformation of Dr Effendi as Weretiger Cub / Son of Sitora depicts the anxiety of his character in mediating the setting of rural and urbanisation, while being principally challenged in combating Malay superstition and taboo that still takes root in a modern society.

Keywords: Double, Doppelganger, Freud, Gothic, Malaysian Gothic, Malaysian Literature, P. Ramlee

INTRODUCTION

The trope of doubling or doppelganger has been traced back to Germanic folklore, which refers to it as a supernatural double of a living person (The American Heritage Dictionary, 1985). The apparition exists to stalk and haunt its living counterpart, and the earliest belief was perceived as the person's inevitable sign of upcoming death. The term, which famously occupies one of many elemental tropes in the horror genre, also lays its footnote under Gothic fictions. A recurring Gothic motif that bespeaks uncanniness, doubling has been laced within disciplines such as anthropology and psychology since its first inception; the belief of a duality of man and the existence of subconscious thoughts that are most often dark and wicked, both innate in nature (Gonzalez, 1998). It reflects the juxtaposition and parallelism of a human's conditions, such as good and evil, virtues and vices, civilised and uncivilised, to name a few. Hughes (2018) notes that Gothic doubles depict "the moral dilemmas or social disparities" that occur in the texts, depending on the intersectional setting in which these stories take place. To add, a situational occurrence that can be imposed as doubling includes cross-dressing, mistaken identity, or being disguised (Hughes, 2018).

Where does *Sitora Harimau Jadian* (1965) fit under the Gothic literature purview, especially on the trope of doubling? Initially made into a motion picture, *Sitora Harimau Jadian* (1965) illustrates the haunting of a weretiger among the villagers in Kampung Kiambang, Johor, Malaysia. Being thrust into an unfamiliar environment, Dr Effendi is tasked to bring about modern advancement to the village, starting with opening a small clinic. The sprout of modernity, driven by Dr Effendi's inspiration to pull the villagers out of outdated and backward mindsets and beliefs, causes enmity between him and Tok Dukun, a witch doctor who performs traditional treatments for both supernatural and bodily ailments. The story is inherently Gothic by its supposed conventions: it dwells within the realm and the hauntings of the supernatural (man-animal shapeshifters and dark magic), shifting power dynamics, and doublings, casting the uncanny from both names and animalistic appearances.

Despite sharing names and physical traits with the weretiger Sitora, it is debatable to say that these creatures share the same hivemind, as the story depicts a strong hold Sitora had on Dr Effendi when he shapeshifted without his will. The latter displays reluctance and guilt but is unable to exercise resistance, which propagates the gap regarding Gothic doubles of existing on the two sides of the same coin. Therefore, this study aims to probe Dr Effendi's psyche and his anxiety mediating between two different settings of the rural and urban that reflect his challenged modern principles on supernatural and taboo beliefs of the Malays in Kampung Kiambang, Johor, Malaysia, through the manifestation of his sired form. In retrospect, this may help to

discover the parallelism inhibited by Sitora itself as the shadow of Dr Effendi. To fulfil this aim, the study will attempt to answer the following objective: to explore the trope of doubling between Dr Effendi and Sitora through the Gothic lens in *Sitora Harimau Jadian* (1965).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literary Doubles in Gothic Literature

The motif of the double in Gothic literature spans variations of interpretations. The earliest published Gothic text, such as *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), written by Horace Walpole, demonstrates the motif in delineating “turpitude and illegitimacy, both political and familial, mirror-images of their opposite: romantic love in place of incestuous embrace, ideal fathers in place of paternal tyranny” (Townshend, 2016). The author (2016) notes the conventions from this novel, similarly depicted in the Gothic romance novels written by Ann Radcliffe, which illustrate the values of bourgeois property and place, and morality and marriage. Meanwhile, Edgar Allan Poe’s short story titled *William Wilson* (1839) portrays doubling as “external conscience”, which author Oscar Wilde also incorporated a similar convention with a minor tweak in his most popular work, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) (Hughes, 2018). According to Sage (1988), the British Gothic inhibits the motif of the double through forms of Protestantism: “notions of the internalised conscience inscribed within the Protestant subject a secret, internal self”. After an array of interpretations of doubling, Townshend (2016) lists more contemporary works that restate the motif in its grotesque and horrifying form, namely the works of “Stephen King’s *The Dark Half* (1989), Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* (1996), Carlos Ruiz Zafón’s *The Shadow of the Wind* (2004), and Audrey Niffenegger’s *Her Fearful Symmetry* (2009)”.

METHOD

To investigate the aim and objective of this study, the researchers use a qualitative approach, specifically literary analysis, as Creswell (2014) believes this approach helps to unearth and comprehend social and human problems. The targeted text of the researchers’ choosing, *Sitora Harimau Jadian* (1965), was first visualised as a motion picture directed by a renowned and multi-talented Malaysian director, P.Ramlee. The film, however, has remained lost, according to multiple trusted accounts, as it was first and last aired on national television in the 70s. In 2012, Fixi Retro, a sub-publishing house under Buku Fixi, re-entered the story in a prose form, enabling readers and Malaysians to enjoy and appreciate *Sitora Harimau Jadian* (1965) as part of the collective national literature.

Both analysis and discussion will be carried out by observing the characters of Dr Effendi and Sitora and how they portray the motif of doubling under the Gothic lens. The data will be based on excerpts from the written text in the form of dialogues and narrative descriptions. Since the primary data is in the Malay language, the excerpts will be accompanied by English translations in the analysis.

Gothic Double

The motif of the double first made its echo during the early Western civilisation, where philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle regarded the dualism of an individual through the distinction between body and soul, and good and evil (Townshend, 2016). He (2016) further claims that there were variations of interpretation and reification of dualism influenced by the emergence of Judeo-Christian theology before it manifested and wormed its way into social and literary discourses.

Hughes (2018) discloses that the motif of the Gothic double is intertwined with psychoanalysis, a branch of the psychology field, pioneered by Sigmund Freud, which deals with the conscious and unconscious psyche of an individual. The notion of the double, according to Freud, reveals shades of one’s personality; a derivative of an alter ego. Doubling either inhibits an individual with conflicting views and fragmented thoughts (internal) or the physical manifestation of a counterpart (external). It also connects to “alienation, transgression, modernisation, and cultural transformation” (Bhandari, 2022).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The Gothic double in *Sitora Harimau Jadian* (1965) sheds light on Dr Effendi's tumultuous psyche; oscillating between embracing modernity and repelling old taboos that were prevalent in the Malay society at Kampung Kiambang, Johor, Malaysia. Firstly, he stands as a symbolic figure that opposes Tok Dukun and overall old superstitions, who resists any semblance of fresh, societal progress. The staunch opposition from Tok Dukun is understandable, as it can be seen as a threat to his livelihood. As the witch doctor at Kampung Kiambang, the villagers sought the treatment provided by him in exchange for cash remuneration, and with the emergence of the weretiger hauntings, Sitora would cement and ensure his relevance at the village.

In comparison to the problem-solving reading strategies, the readers used a few similar strategies that eased their online reading process.

For a character that is hell-bent on rejecting any progress or any kind of modern way of doing things, Tok Dukun has no issue benefiting from capitalism, as revealed in the text that he was the Sitora who haunted Kampung Kiambang to no end (Ramlee, 1965, p. 201). The fraudulent figure imposed protection fees for those who required his assistance in extinguishing the supernatural threat, and not doing so would guarantee constant, disturbing rampages of the weretiger (Ramlee, 1965, p. 16). This indicates the similarity he shares with Dr Effendi in adapting to modern society, albeit his intention is never related to seeing the betterment of the villagers' well-being, but to fuel both his ego and bank account.

When conscripted to the village that was deemed rural, Dr Effendi pondered his fate and the unfamiliarity of being sequestered in a foreign setting, as if he was uprooted from his usual element and belonging. This can be seen on page 38 of the text:

Dr Effendi agak tidak senang. Sebenarnya dia tidak begitu senang tinggal di desa yang terlalu sunyi. Dia telah biasa dengan udara kota dengan lampu - lampu neon yang beribu aneka. Kini, di desa itu ia terpaksa mengurung dirinya di dalam kesepian dan kesunyian. Walau bagaimanapun, untuk mengatakan yang ianya tidak suka sudah tentu di luar perhitungannya.

*Dr Effendi felt **unease** with his current situation. He had never enjoyed living in a quiet village because he was so used to the arid city air and the brightness of the electrifying neon lights. Although the village **entrapped** him in **eerie silence** and **loneliness**, he had no choice but to bear through it all.*

(Ramlee, 1965, p. 38)

The bolded words of “unease”, “entrapped”, “eerie silence”, and “loneliness” show the earlier signs of Gothic transgression experienced by Dr Effendi. Although he remained firm in his modern principles and beliefs at this particular juncture of this story, he recognised the suffocation of the unknown he could not place as of yet. From the initial accounts of a few villagers regarding their terrifying encounters with Sitora, he treated the affected villagers through a modern approach of science and medicine, and its effectiveness was enough to convince the villagers that the service provided by Tok Dukun was beginning to falter.

However, when Dr Effendi finally crossed paths with Sitora, his principles began to dwindle (Ramlee, 1965, p. 84-85), and his credibility was questioned by the Village Chief, indicating that his presence was to combat superstition, not propagating it (Ramlee, 1965, p. 85). The willingness to seek out the person who shares opposite values and thinking for the greater good, in this case, extinguishing Sitora, speaks volumes of Dr Effendi's character that embodies goodness and virtue.

Yet, the anxiety that already occupies his state of mind is epitomised when he was sired by Sitora himself. Akin to the Westernised depiction of turning werewolves, Dr Effendi was turned after his open wound on his neck was mixed with Sitora's blood (Ramlee, 1965, p. 143). Another irony of the mediating rural versus urban notion, instead of scratching the wound open with his animalistic claws, Sitora used a knife, which is a symbolic man-made hunting weapon that precipitated human civilisation. Nonetheless, it does not reflect his

over-reliance on the supernatural to achieve his wicked means, despite subconsciously tending to grasp on the thread of adaptation to modern civilisation for self-survival.

Now affected, Dr Effendi was regarded as Anak Harimau Jadian / Anak Sitora, or in rough translation, the Weretiger Cub / Son of Sitora, who had a splitting image of his sire, or supposed father (Ramlee, 1965, p. 146-147). When in his weretiger form, Dr Effendi had no recollection of the villagers he had traumatised in his path (Ramlee, 1965, p. 149), but he was seen to be remorseful of his action. He is reduced to a permanent master-slave relationship with Sitora, as the latter has control of his behaviour, especially when he transforms into Sitora's lesser self. At this point, their power dynamic is not interchangeable because Dr Effendi had no other means of escaping by himself, except for the help of his acquaintances. Based on this evidence, it harks back to the trope of Gothic doubling, where, despite the apparent parallelism, both Dr Effendi and Sitora mediate the motif sequentially, as each is a shadow of the other, occupying the binary oppositions of good versus evil within their respective undercurrent.

CONCLUSION

The manifestation of anxiety mediation within multiple opposite settings is projected from the transformation of Dr Effendi into the Weretiger Cub, as his psyche oscillates to stay on the path he deems correct and just, but at the same time is subjected to volatile changes as he has also foreseen supernatural forces that were easier if not witnessed firsthand and rendered as mere myth or village superstition. It challenges his principles and modern approach in his thinking and actions, and the same can be said for his double, Sitora, except that the latter transgresses into a road with no point of return or semblance of redemption. A text that is inherently Gothic in nature, the trope of doubling in *Sitora Harimau Jadian* (1965) helps to expand more discussion under this purview in the contemporary setting of Malaysia.

Despite its significant result, there are a few limitations to this research. Since the film has remained lost, the researchers are unable to trace the materials like production notes, film reviews and any oral or written histories from surviving cast, crew or audience members that could cement the impact of this study on the public's reception when the film was released in the 70's. As a suggestion, future researchers are advised to include readers' reception of the story in a prose form to identify whether the result of the study can be tallied with the reception of the masses. The other limitation of this research includes the scarcity of theories like Malaysian Gothic, Islamic studies, Southeast Asian film and Gothic scholarship in the comparative and cinematic analysis discipline. It is hoped that more in-depth research can be done to investigate the doubling, preferably under the lens of Malaysian Gothic, within the sensibilities of the Pre-Islamic Malaya versus the Islamic state of Malaysia, and the impact of colonialisation on Malay societies that reside in rural areas, impervious to modern changes and perceiving modernisation as foreign, that they believe may alter their identity inherited from their precursors.

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