



# **The Gothic Family Romance: Heterosexuality, Child Sacrifice, and the Anglo-Irish Colonial Order (Post-Contemporary Interventions)**

*Margot Backus*

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Tales of child sacrifice, demon lovers, incestual relations, and returns from the dead are part of English and Irish gothic literature. Such recurring tropes are examined in this pioneering study by Margot Gayle Backus to show how Anglo-Irish gothic works written from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries reflect the destructive effects of imperialism on the children and later descendants of Protestant English settlers in Ireland.

Backus uses contemporary theory, including that of Michel Foucault and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, to analyze texts by authors ranging from Richardson, Swift, Burke, Edgeworth, Stoker, and Wilde to contemporary Irish novelists and playwrights.

By charting the changing relations between the family and the British state, she shows how these authors dramatized a legacy of violence within the family cell and discusses how disturbing themes of child sacrifice and colonial repression are portrayed through irony, satire, “paranoid” fantasy, and gothic romance. In a reconceptualization of the Freudian family romance, Backus argues that the figures of the Anglo-Irish gothic embody the particular residue of childhood experiences within a settler colonial society in which biological reproduction represented an economic and political imperative.

Backus’s bold positioning of the nuclear family at the center of post-Enlightenment class and colonial power relations in England and Ireland will challenge and provoke scholars in the fields of Irish literature and British and postcolonial studies. The book will also interest students and scholars of women’s studies, and it has important implications for understanding contemporary conflicts in Ireland.

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