

GOTHIC NATURE



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Kristy Strange

Since its inception, the Gothic has been haunted by modernity—both fascinated and fearful of the speed at which its uncertainties unravel into new realities that expand, infect, and mutate all corners of the globe. Ten years on from the 2013 collection *Globalgothic* edited by Glennis Byron, Rebecca Duncan's new collection offers expanded and diverse approaches to understanding the globalgothic. As the economic-centred world-systems version of globalisation spreads, the ghosts of the past have become the monsters of the present (pp. 26-27). These modern-day, systemic monsters desire nothing more than to continue historical practices of extraction, exploitation and accumulation. The explicit realities of colonial heteropatriarchy have taken on a modern disguise in implicit systems of capitalistic heteropatriarchy. It is this disguise that *The Edinburgh Companion to Globalgothic* aims to unravel, revealing the historically entangled systems of colonialism that cannot be separated from the globalisation of capitalism and its neoliberal philosophy. This edited collection shows why the practice of naming matters and tasks the reader with questioning the current imbalances of narrative control.

The importance of naming is immediately made apparent to the reader in the collection's introductory chapter. Duncan outlines her argument in the definition of the term globalgothic that she posits in opposition to traditional 'globalisation theory' rooted in a world-systems analysis approach that locates the spread of capitalism in the twentieth century (p. 2). Duncan argues that this positioning dismisses the impact of early colonialism, specifically how the act of conquest enabled both foreign land and bodies to be viewed and used as exploitable resources. Instead, she suggests that the globalisation of capitalism 'begins in the "long" sixteenth century, when the powers of Western Europe set out to expropriate the resources of the so-called New World' (p. 2). This New World, the bedrock for a global economy, is a focal point for Byron's original definition of the globalgothic. In contrast, Duncan takes an alternative approach by turning to Moore's theory of world-ecology. World-ecology unearths the encoded violence in the cyclical pattern of 'crisis and global transformation' made visible in capitalism's accelerated exploitation and exhaustion of

resources (pp. 5-6). The argument for this ecological definition of the globalgothic is greatly needed in the rapidly developing context of an entangled Planetary Gothic, to which Duncan turns her attention in the coda of the collection.

The collection is structurally organised into four parts: Approaches, Issues, Modes, and Regions and Geographies. Although I suspect most readers will engage with this text by selecting specific chapters to read, I would encourage everyone to read the entirety of ‘Part I – Approaches’. It provides a basis for a wide range of popular debates and challenges how scholars might approach a nuanced analysis of these diverse narratives and their histories. Topics include decoloniality, necropolitics, Black diaspora, queering ecologies, ecohorror, and more. The first chapter, ‘Decolonial Gothic’ by Sheri-Marie Harrison, lays the foundations for this collection’s reworking of the global and, fundamentally, the Gothic by emphasising a decolonial rather than a postcolonial analysis as necessary for the context of a world-ecology approach. The decolonial analysis thus supports a resurrection of ‘cultural legacy’ traditionally neglected in privileged narratives (p. 70). This is further explored in Maisha Wester’s chapter on ‘Gothic and the Black Diaspora’. Wester speaks to the threat of historical and corporeal erasure through the abuse of language. An excess of language results in the transmutation of truths—a fabrication of selected voices and histories. Like the Extractive Gothic, proposed by Sharae Deckard (2023) in her contribution of the same name, the act of unearthing buried histories of violence and exploitation must be examined to expose the depths of the commodification and exhaustion of human and nonhuman resources, revealing a blood-stained bedrock composed of skeletons.

Part II ranges from colonial conquest and war to terrorism, technologies, and entangled ecologies. The role of the “invisible” imperialism of the United States takes centre stage across several chapters with an examination of its origins as a British colony to its participation in battles for conquest and its alienation of others, especially in the ‘pure paranoid potential’ of terrorism (p. 179). In the chapter, ‘Terrorist Gothic’, by Steffen Hantke, language is once again questioned as he notes the continued instability of the definition of terrorism and, subsequently, terrorists, arguing that the Gothic provides a uniquely intimate space for internal perception. This reflexive potential is further explored in examinations of neoliberal globalisation and its murderous, suicidal drive for a dominant so-called ‘individual’ identity (i.e. White, heterosexual, and male)—a

desperate war for supremacy in a changing world. Such change is presented in issues perhaps more familiar to the *Gothic Nature* reader, including the chapters ‘Uncanny Globalgothic Ecologies: Animate Intimacies’ by Chloé Germaine—a personal favourite from the collection—and ‘Pandemics and Globalgothic’ by Johan Höglund. As we mutate our lives into the so-called ‘new normal’ in a (contested) ‘post’ pandemic period, Höglund discusses a new term in the hotly debated battle of the ‘cenes’: Virocene. The Virocene contains strains throughout history that infect and thus expose reactive narratives of global inequalities and injustices: a mutation of what it means to be human.

The in-depth examination of these dominant issues resurrects the globalgothic’s capacity to offer insights into the hidden and buried realities of the planetary polycrisis. Crucially, these chapters also critique the traditional gothic narratives and their contemporary appropriations for their role in perpetuating racism and xenophobia through maintained dualisms (that benefit a capitalistic and neoliberal ideology) to justify the conquest over the ‘terrifying other’. However, one issue that is noticeably lacking is that of globalgothic ideas on competing/conquering theologies, which is especially important to consider because of the central influence of religion on imperial Britain (and the imperial United States, as argued by Kevin Corstorphine in his essay contribution) and, thus, globalisation. This surprised me, considering the long history between the Gothic and religion and the fact that the prevalence of theologies, as an ingrained issue, is mentioned in several of these chapters. Despite this, the surface of the topic is never breached. The absence of this issue is also notable due to the planetary implications (i.e. the justification of possession and consumption of resources—and people). Although the separation of religion and state has, perhaps, led to an invisibility of influence, the roots of its histories are still entirely intertwined in the realities of globalisation.

‘Part III – Modes’ presents topics including translations, tourism, travel writing, Folk Horror, Brexit, and Online Gothic. Personally, this is the section that felt the most disjointed. As previously noted, most readers will likely engage with this text in select ways, so my critique will not necessarily be relevant to readings that follow this approach. To make this part more cohesive, another mode or two is necessary to bring together a few of the (temporarily) dropped strands of discourse. In this part, mode is used to reference specific forms of writing. Thus, a chapter on

Speculative Fiction (e.g. Sci-Fi) and the Gothic would help strengthen the lost discourse of ecologies and subsequent gendered/queer approaches, which were championed in part one. Nevertheless, this is a minor issue in an extraordinary collection, and these chapters are no less impressive. The section begins with Sandra Guardini Vasconcelos's chapter, titled 'Globalgothic Translations and Migrations: From Britain to Brazil', which argues that the appropriation of Gothic tropes through its globalisation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries means that the globalgothic can be considered beyond the exclusive borders of contemporary narratives—an argument that has wider implications and applications than the chapter's focus on Brazil and Britain. These considerations are especially significant if we consider how previous analysis of the globalgothic has focused primarily on contemporary or recently revived gothic narratives (i.e. appropriated folklore). This issue is examined in the following chapters that turn to tourism, which 'often shadows the routes of historic colonialism', and travel writing, focusing on bringing the ghosts from these travels home (p. 280). The migrations of the consequences of colonial histories are riddled with haunting violence and silenced disembodied voices, translating into the fears and anxieties examined in the 'homely' context of Britain through the modes of Folk Horror and Brexit Gothic.

'Part IV – Regions and Geographies' challenges geographical separations in global discourse and highlights a variety of perhaps lesser-known categories of the Gothic, including emerging localities such as the Desert Gothic. Of particular interest, Rebekah Cumpsty's chapter, titled 'Gothic and the Global South', presents readers with an opportunity for reflection on the ways that the historical, binary separation of the Global North and South is not only lacking in its understanding of complex global relationships but simultaneously perpetuates uneven lived experiences and denies culpability and responsibility of oppressors—a denial of entangled local and global histories. The section speaks to fabricated 'open' borders and the relationship between harsh, natural environments and militia in the implication of constraints and obedience. Borders are built and broken as local folklore is appropriated and commodified to suit a global market, and feminine bodies are subjected to an increasingly violent neoliberal modernity (i.e. Gore Capitalism). In resistance to this violence, dispossession and erasure, attempts of restorative histories are inspected, violated, and disposed of irrelevant to physical corporealities. The chapter titled 'Queer Gothic Narratives of Palestine in Alon Hilu's *The House of Rajani* and Ayman

Sikseck's *Tishrin*' by Karen Grumberg is an exceptional piece of analysis that demonstrates the globalgothic discourse of challenging 'historical truths' through an examination of contested/competing, alternative/restorative histories at the heart of dispossession and possession, especially over disputed lands and, subsequently, identities and bodies. Grumberg states that 'the narrative mechanisms become the stories themselves'; the haunting of language calls attention to both narrative voice and its oppositional, oppressed silence (p. 441).

Ultimately, Duncan's edited collection highlights that the globalgothic is more than a response to globalisation but resurrects the 'undead' violent, colonial past to expose the illusion of globalisation as a world-system as erroneous—an illusion that actively engages in local, historical erasure and its impact on globalisation. Although intimidating in its size, the careful consideration and dedication to each topic means that this collection succinctly compiles a thorough, robust analysis of the globalgothic. It encompasses a range of ideas, recognising the potential pitfalls of current dominant discourses and increasing the visibility of historically overlooked voices and experiences. For this reason, I believe that this text should be an essential part of any university library. The scope of this book is beyond the (permeable) borders of the Gothic; globalgothic provides alternative approaches that focus on the visibility of hidden, neglected anxieties and realities that are ever-present in literature and other forms of popular culture. These approaches define modern scholarly discourse: can the Gothic be anything but global in its history?

BIOGRAPHY

Kristy Strange (she/her) is a second-year PhD student at the University of Westminster. She holds an MLitt in The Gothic Imagination from the University of Stirling (Scotland) as well as a BA in both English Literature and Applied Psychology from Bishop's University (Quebec, Canada). Her doctoral thesis presents an ecofeminist examination of the use of the gothic mode in women's speculative fiction, arguing that these narratives highlight the climate crisis and its silenced histories in conceptualising climate change as an embodied haunted/haunting encounter.

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