

Cynthia Sugars. *Canadian Gothic: Literature, History and the Spectre of Self-Invention*. Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2014. Pp. x, 291. US\$150.00.

Cynthia Sugars' *Canadian Gothic* explores the ghosts of settlers past and how recent diasporic and Indigenous writers are unsettling their inherited traditions. Sugars argues that the use of the Gothic is a long-standing strategy for connecting the Old World and New World through shared literary mythologies and for infusing the untamable Canadian landscape with a narrativized past. This Gothic tradition, however, is founded on an exclusionary nationalism that renders non-white Anglo-Canadians as other. Building on her earlier work on the postcolonial Gothic and the unhomey, Sugars makes another significant contribution to the field of Canadian Gothic scholarship by examining the longstanding mutually constitutive relationship between Canadian nationalism, the land, and ghosts in a variety of literary genres. *Canadian Gothic* spans from the sixteenth to the twenty-first centuries to trace the Gothic literary tradition in what is now called Canada; the book is divided into seven chapters that not only offer a historical survey and an analysis of multiple genres but also explore the distinctions between Anglo- and French-Canadian Gothic narratives. *Canadian Gothic* ultimately establishes the persistent presence of ghosts and the Gothic in Canadian literature.

Canadian Gothic begins by analyzing the often overlooked ghosts in two famous Canadian poems, Robert Service's "The Cremation of Sam McGee" (1907) and John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields" (1919). The Introduction then turns to a myriad of writers, such as Susanna Moodie, Duncan Campbell Scott, Robertson Davies, James Reaney, and Margaret Sweatman, among others, in order to argue that "from very early on the Gothic has held a precarious, even contradictory, position in Canadian literature" because Canada "had long been perceived as either a location of monstrous extremes or an empty terrain that was unhaunted by a historical tradition" (8). Ironically, as Sugars asserts, the absence of a Canadian past or mythology is conveyed through Gothic sensations of horrific newness.

Chapter One delves deeper into Gothic absence and the paradoxical phenomenon of being haunted by a lack of ghosts. Using white European explorers' encounters with the New World as case studies, the first chapter demonstrates how early explorers projected their psychic fears onto Indigenous peoples. The second chapter surveys the larger national investment in the Gothic tradition as a strategy for defining a Canadian identity. Sugars asserts that "settler Canadian literature has from its beginnings been

haunted by its efforts to ‘story’ itself” (50); in short, “The absence of the Gothic is aligned with a failure of poetry and a failure of imagination—more specifically with a failure to write Canada into history” (67). Sugars suggests that the Gothic not only captures the spectrality of a lacking Canadian national identity but also, as a form of artistic creation, offers a solution to this absence.

While Chapter Two equates Canada’s lack of a national mythology with a lack of ghosts, Chapter Three develops an analysis of psychic projection by arguing that Anglo-Canadian writers started replacing the Indigenous *other* with a Francophone spectral threat. The third chapter nicely integrates the previous two chapters’ arguments of psychic projection and national identity by suggesting that Anglo-Canadian culture absorbs New France through fantasies of Gothic excess, thereby legitimating a “modern” Canadian culture through the archaic Gothic (106). Chapter Four extends the use of the Gothic as a method for substantiating a Canadian literary tradition by examining the insertion of settler or Aboriginal ghosts into the landscape as two strategies for “plac[ing] settler descendants as secure ‘inheritors’ of the land and its spirit” (109). Psychic projection rears its ugly head yet again as Sugars reveals how “settler displacement of Aboriginal culture turns First Nations communities into a mirror of White alienation” (141). The fifth chapter investigates the aftermath of colonialism and writers’ strategies for engaging with this troubled legacy.

As a welcome complication of the book’s previous chapters, the final two chapters problematize the legacy of the Gothic tradition as a substantiation of white Anglo-Canadian culture. The sixth chapter considers diasporic responses to narratives of haunting and Canada’s fraught history of racial othering. “As the authority of national metanarratives founded on notions of inclusion and representation are increasingly destabilized,” Sugars contends that “they persist in being haunted by the encrypted ghosts of unnameable others who were sequestered beyond the iconography of public memory” (182). Chapter Six investigates narratives of these spectral unnameable others in works by Wayson Choy, Hiromi Goto, and David Chariandry, among others. The seventh chapter fittingly questions the very validity of the application of the category of Gothic to Indigenous literature, examining moments of inversion where writers appropriate Gothic techniques in order to turn them against the colonizer. Looking at works by Pauline Johnson, Thomas King, Eden Robinson, Daniel David Moses, and Joseph Boyden, the seventh chapter showcases Sugars’ ability to develop an analysis of the Gothic through multiple authors and genres. According to Sugars, “The Indigenous spirits that appear in these works point to the inadequacy of a Western—

possibly even postcolonial—epistemology that relegates spirits to a memory effect rather than to a material presence in the here and now” (246). Sugars, then, does not merely examine the long-standing tradition of the Gothic in the land now called Canada, she queries and challenges the values, paradoxes, and exclusionary practices of this very tradition.

Canadian Gothic offers a valuable resource to scholars and students interested in the Gothic, Canadian literature, memory, ghosts, and nation building. As the book reveals, Canadian literature has at once used the Gothic for “national self-invention” and for “national un-doing” (247). The ghost, then, is a suitable form for this history of what Sugars calls Canada’s “settled unsettlement” because it makes manifest the “national self *as* ghostly” as Canada continues to try to grasp that most spectral of presences, a national identity (254).

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