

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CHILDREN'S GOTHIC: FROM THE WANDERER TO NOMADIC SUBJECT (2018) BY CHLOÉ GERMAINE BUCKLEY

Review by Sarah Olive

Germaine Buckley, Chloé. *Twenty-First Century Children's Gothic: From The Wanderer To Nomadic Subject*. Edinburgh, 2018. 232 pp.

I quickly warmed to this book, because Chloé Germaine Buckley's foregrounding of the figure of the nomad gelled well with my sense that, in writing this review, I am somewhat of a disciplinary nomad finding fresh pasture herein to nourish my flock of thoughts about Shakespearean afterlives. Alternatively, Germaine Buckley's reading of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari suggests that I might usefully reject notions of a singular academic identity (Shakespearean, Gothic, nomad) and embrace "multiple possible iterations of a self that is continually in the process of becoming" (3). At any rate, I have not yet become a specialist in Gothic or Children's Literature, so perhaps one of the most useful things I can do in this review is to suggest some ways in which Germaine Buckley's work intersects with present concerns in literary criticism beyond, as well as within, their immediate field and the specific works that they consider in this book.

These texts include Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* (1999-2006), with chapters dedicated to the following fictional works and films: Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* (2002), Darren Shan's *Zom-B* (2012-16), Jamila Gavin's *Coram Boy* (2000), Paula Morris' *Ruined* (2009), Francis Hardinge's *The Lie Tree* (2015), the "Weird Fiction" of Derek Landy and Anthony Horowitz, Tim Burton's *Frankenweenie* (2002), as well as Sam Fell and Chris Butler's *Paranorman* (2012). This sample – or more importantly Germaine Buckley's reflexivity about it – is the only aspect of this book that I would like to see enhanced. It does deal with issues of race, gender, just about grazing sexuality, particularly in relation to characters in *Coram Boy* and *Zom-B* as well as female authors and readers. However, the sample is linguistically and culturally anglocentric. It is dominated by Western Gothic, eschewing Gothic in translation or non-Western Gothic written in English. This could be representative of the genre, therefore limiting what was available to be sampled, but that seems unlikely given the global Gothic texts identified in Anna Jackson's *New Directions in Children's Gothic: Debatable Lands* (2017); Glennis Byron's *Globalgothic* project and publications; and the popularity of non-prose Asian gothic texts, such as those identified in Sarah Olive, Alex Watson, and Chelsea Swift's "British Gothic Monsters in East Asia" bibliography, with young audiences. It deserves fuller discussion within the book: all the more so given Germaine Buckley's own emphasis on multiplicity in extant range of twenty-first-century Children's Gothic.

One of the threads that unites the works sampled in Germaine Buckley's analysis includes their intended audience of children. Germaine Buckley is careful throughout to elucidate the difference between intended audiences, or imagined readerships, and actual ones. They emphasise the child as a construct and thoroughly engage in defining their own preferred construction of the child. Specifically, they reject the separate categories of children's and young adult literature and films, preferring to use "children's" to encompass both throughout. They attend to the way in which Children's Gothic is predominantly written, chosen, and purchased by adults for children, mediating between the author and their intended readership. I also thoroughly enjoyed Germaine Buckley's attention to the dominance of adults in determining what Ronald Carter terms "socio-cultural" markers of literariness, for example in reviewing Children's Gothic fiction, nominating and judging it for awards, deciding which texts are acquired by libraries, or set on the curriculum.

Another thread that cross-cuts the monograph and immediately appealed to me because of my research and teaching on English literature in education, concerns the tensions between Children's Literature as pedagogical, a pervasive influence of the liberal humanist tradition, and the Gothic, which is traditionally seen as transgressive. Germaine Buckley evidences these tensions by drawing on the work of Victoria Carrington and Bruno Bettelheim. Germaine Buckley successfully critiques the idea that children are passive readers to whom Gothic, gory, or frightening literature transmits negative messages. The *Twilight* saga on page (2005-2008) and screen (2008-2012) is given by Germaine Buckley as an example of cultural critics policing works' potential harm to readers who are constructed as young, female, and therefore inherently vulnerable. While showcasing others' ideas concerning Gothic Children's Literature as a resource contributing positively to build coping, resilience, motivation, identity, critical literacy, and citizenship skills (along the lines of rights and responsibilities), Germaine Buckley argues convincingly for greater significance of Children's Gothic now in offering "lines of flight from limiting representations" (12). They avoid the paternalism that they argue is so widespread in critical traditions of Children's Literature, the monologising approach that sees Children's Gothic in service of reading, assigned one (educative, moralising) social function. To counter this paternalism, Germaine Buckley posits as valuable the potential of subversive cultural products for entertainment, playfulness, indulgence, pleasure, and spectacle. Germaine Buckley finds in the chosen texts some well-established Gothic features and tropes: serialisation, intertextuality, social, and cultural anxiety (though they also suggest ways to transcend this), oppressive fathers, absent mothers, imprisonment, and surfaces. However, Germaine Buckley's distinct contribution is a sustained focus on nomadism, specifically the nomadic subjectivity of child protagonists, tracing the way in which the tragic wanderer in older, canonical Gothic texts becomes the happy (or, at least, non-despairing), nomadic subject in Children's Gothic: even though homelessness, exile, catastrophe, and disintegration do not necessarily resolve in these texts into "cosy restitution," journeys, adventure, and transformations are relished by characters and readers alike (2).

The book engages expansively with critical, literary, and educational theory, discussing the work of Rosi Braidotti (given her work on nomadic subjects), Mikhail Bakhtin, Roland Barthes, and Benedict Spinoza at length. The stranglehold of psychoanalysis, pervading popular attitudes towards children and childhood, is particularly effectively critiqued, as is the paternalism of Maria

Nikolajeva's problematisation of identificatory reading practices as impacting negatively on children's critical faculties. Another contribution of the book is the rejection of some Gothic criticism's assertion that the genre (use of its visual aesthetics; inclusion of generic self-parody) has become diffuse, all-embracing, and commodified, to the point of becoming an empty term. Fred Botting's work, in particular, is identified as contributing to a critical panic that is bogged down in, and overwhelmed by its self-appointed task of, sifting the authentic Gothic from the inauthentic chaff.

Germaine Buckley also strongly rejects the sometime positing of Children's Literature as a degraded or immature Gothic, asserting instead its place within a shared Gothic literary history. Heterogeneity is shown not to be an achievable or desirable feature of twenty-first century Children's Gothic, which includes subgenres such as Psychological, Dark, Urban, Pulp, and Weird. Nor is heterogeneity a novel quality of the Gothic or going to cause its collapse. Germaine Buckley cites, in support of this claim, the overlaps between early Gothic, mediaeval, and historical Romance as well as its intertextual reliance on, and retroactive incorporation of older works into, a Gothic canon. Furthermore, as Germaine Buckley demonstrates, attention to Children's Gothic is demanded given that it dominates children's publishing: Germaine Buckley emphasises the prevalence of paranormal teen romances across various media as an example. Their dismissal of doomsayers for Gothic integrity is but one of the ways in which Germaine Buckley's text intersects with that of Catherine Spooner's *Post-millennial Gothic: Comedy, Romance and the Rise of Happy Gothic* (2017). Both texts cite each other throughout; share similar temporal delimitations, even while they problematise the idea of the millennium as a watershed moment for (children's) Gothic; identify and resist the long tradition of maligning feminine forms of the Gothic. I read the two books in the same month and they make excellent companions; Germaine Buckley's work offers an apposite resonance with that of Spooner as both offer fresh perspectives on contemporary Gothic. Given that Spooner was the former's thesis supervisor, this is indeed not particularly surprising and rather demonstrates the impact of their collective, critical work. Simultaneously this productive confluence highlights Germaine Buckley as an insightful and prominent upcoming critic in their own right, one who is sure to become a notable name in Children's Gothic studies.

BIONOTES

Sarah Olive is a Senior Lecturer in English in Education at the University of York, UK. Her first monograph *Shakespeare Valued* was published by Intellect in 2015. She is currently working on a second monograph, *Shakespeare in East Asian Education*, with Li Jun, Adele Lee, and Kohei Uchimarui for Palgrave. In 2017, she received funding from the Daiwa Foundation and ESRC York Impact Acceleration Fund to co-organise the Gothic in Japan symposium with Alex Watson (Nagoya). One outcome was an updated version of their *British Gothic Monsters in East Asia* biblio/film/discography, freely available online, open for comment, addition, and alteration.