GOTHIC BRITAIN: DARK PLACES IN THE PROVINCES AND MARGINS OF THE BRITISH ISLES (2018) EDITED BY WILLIAM HUGHES AND RUTH HEHOLT

Review by Derek Johnston

Hughes, William and Ruth Heholt, editors. *Gothic Britain: Dark Places in the Provinces and Margins of the British Isles.* University of Wales Press, 2018. 253 pp.

Hughes' and Heholt's collection concerns itself with Britain, and particularly its edge-places, as Gothic spaces. It is divided into three sections: "Re-Imagined Gothic Landscapes: Folklore, Nostalgia and History," "Unnatural Gothic Spaces," and "Border Crossings and the Threat of Invasion," yet there are obvious connections across each of these broad themes. Indeed, the book as a whole clearly demonstrates how the Gothic has provided and still provides a useful mode for approaching questions of selfhood, whether that is the selfhood of the individual or of the nation. It does this by considering Britain as a place which is threatened by the outside, but which is also fragmented internally, a Frankenstein creation of multiple cultures and places and peoples theoretically united as one, yet containing numerous tensions. The case studies engaged with are primarily literary, although Ruth Heholt's chapter is concerned with two Hammer films set in Cornwall, while Holly-Gale Millette considers Ripper tourism in Whitechapel. While this does mean the exclusion of some very interesting uses of the Gothic and the regional in other media, the range of texts engaged with is impressive, from the familiar to the unfamiliar, the early nineteenth century to the present, and the chapters typically make good use of the selected case studies as ways of illustrating and encouraging engagement with a wider issue.

The book opens with an introduction by William Hughes, emphasising "Gothic beyond the Metropolis." This sets up the tension between London and the rest of Britain as productively used and interrogated by the Gothic. Hughes stays away from specifying any definition of 'the Gothic,' while relating directly to key conceptions of the genre and its characteristics, and by placing the ideas he is discussing in relation to foundational texts, such as Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764). This introduction is followed by Catherine Spooner's consideration of "Regionalism, Folklore and Elisabeth Gaskell's 'Northern Gothic,'" a chapter that presents a number of ideas that could have been usefully incorporated into the collection's introduction because they are revisited in many of the following chapters. These recurring concepts include the significance of folklore and legend to local identities, the concept of psychogeography, and the Victorian Gothic's retreat from European settings towards British regional ones.

Chloé Germaine Buckley's chapter on Jeremy Dyson's *The Haunted Book* (2012) similarly develops the connections between location and haunting through the concept of psychogeography. Germaine Buckley emphasises that pychogeographic associations need not relate to factual events, but may also relate to fiction. What this chapter most successfully demonstrates through its reference to Dyson's novel is that the sense of a place can accumulate through the media: that a region can be haunted by novels and films, and that those fictions can overwrite and erase the real. Germaine Buckley capably uses her own familiarity with the area concerned, which helps to convey the sense of unease as the certainty of her personal memory is destabilised by Dyson's use of actual locations and institutions.

The most curious chapter of this book is Richard Storer's "'Spook Business': Hall Caine and the Moment of Manx Gothic," which deals with a moment of regional Gothic that did not quite arrive. It portrays Hall Caine and T. E. Brown's understanding of Manx superstition and their reference to it in their narratives. However, neither actually developed these connections to create a fully Gothic text, instead tending to use superstition as a piece of dressing, then withdrawing from fully implementing it. While the chapter is interesting in drawing out the connections between Brown, Hall and Bram Stoker's *The Lair of the White Worm* (1911), its role in this collection seems unclear.

This first section closes with Gioia Angeletti's consideration of James Robertson's *The Testament of Gideon Mack* (2006) as part of a tradition of Scottish supernatural fiction that presents its settings as regions of permeable and uncertain reality. This concept could have been interestingly explored for its relation to Scottish history, the way this has been overwritten, romanticised, forgotten and reinvented, and what this means for 'Scottishness.' This would also have served to tie the concepts of this chapter to the concerns of Jamil Mustafa's later chapter on Walter Scott's use of the Gothic to address his ambiguous feelings about the Union of Scotland and England. Mustafa argues that Gothic enables Scott to metaphorically engage with a tension between pride in Scottish identity and pragmatic support of the stronger Union, when it would have been impolitic for him to express any doubts openly. Dialogue between this piece and Angeletti's could be potentially very productive.

The usefulness of focusing on a small set of case studies to illuminate a larger issue is demonstrated by Timothy Jones' chapter on Robert Aickman. Jones argues that Aickman's stories of the supernatural and uncanny present the British regions as an escape from the modern cities, where people can experience the numinous, the unnerving and the weird in ways that break them out of their everyday experience.

The ambiguous position of the university town is central to Minna Vuohelainen's chapter. Examining the representation of the university in texts such as *Jude the Obscure* (1895), *She* (1887), Oliphant's "The Library Window" (1896), Doyle's "Lot No.249" (1892) and the ghost stories of M. R. James, Vuohelainen outlines how the Gothic expresses late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century tensions around the position and role of the university.

In the only chapter in this collection focused on London, Holly-Gale Millette considers responses to the 'Jack-the-Ripper' murders in Whitechapel. Comparing two approaches to knowledge and heritage, Millette ultimately asks the reader to interrogate how we respond to real-life horror, encouraging an understanding of the differences between Gothic tourism and dark tourism.

Ben Richardson's chapter on Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) establishes how cholera epidemics in the early nineteenth century, which demonstrated vulnerabilities created by global trade, can be seen as a profound influence on this apocalyptic novel. As Richardson argues, Shelley's novel explicitly connects trade with disease, encouraging an interpretation of globalisation as leading to a national body infected, potentially fatally, by outside influences. While this could be interpreted as a gloomy reflection on the inevitable demise of the local in the face of the global, Richardson makes clear that Shelley was actually deeply engaged with the positives of cosmopolitanism, and that the novel also expresses this more complex set of attitudes.

The foreignness of Cornwall is the subject of Ruth Heholt's chapter on Hammer's *The Plague of the Zombies* and *The Reptile* (both 1966), and coincidentally also formed the basis of Heholt's keynote talk at the Locating Fantastika conference in 2015. Heholt engages with long-standing ideas of Cornwall as somewhat apart from mainstream English life, populated by a Celtic remnant of smugglers and miners. The two films show this native foreignness as recognised by characters arriving from London, only to find that the Cornish foreignness has itself been invaded by horrors brought back from the colonies by exploitative English colonisers. They thus can be seen as a part of the Imperial Gothic, which shows Gothic Otherness being brought to Britain by the mechanisms of Empire. In each case, the foreign horror serves to bring down the patriarchal, exploitative figures that have brought them into the semi-domestic space of Cornwall.

Finally, Sarah Ilott's chapter examines two novels which use a Kentish setting to engage with this notion of the edge of Britain as a place where the nation interacts with the rest of the world. She connects the literary Gothic to ongoing xenophobic rhetoric around immigrants and refugees. David Dabydeen's *Disappearance* (1993) and Helen Oyeyemi's *White is for Witching* (2009) both draw on "Imperial Gothic in order to expose and exploit its ambiguities" (p.212). So this chapter once again serves to demonstrate how the strength of the Gothic and its continued importance lies in this characteristic sense of ambiguity, which remains vital to the way that societies deal with the ambiguities and uncertainties around national identity, around the desire to preserve the self-balanced against the competing desire to engage with others to the benefit of both, the same tensions that Richardson highlighted in relation to *The Last Man*.

Overall, this is an excellent collection full of interesting ideas and examples that help to draw out some of the complexities of the use of the regions of Britain as Gothic locations. I would have liked to have seen some more elements of overview; I often think that edited collections such as this would benefit from a concluding as well as introductory overview. It would also have been interesting to see considerations of cities outside of London as regional, although elements of this can be found in Vuohelainen's chapter on universities and university cities. While it is mentioned,

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Wales also seems under-represented here. However, rather than continuing to criticise this collection for what it does not do, I will end by recommending it for its consistent high quality of presentation and engagement with texts and ideas, which is a superb way to encourage the reader to continue the development of these notions themselves.

BIONOTE

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