

**Gerry Turcotte. *Peripheral Fear: Transformations of the Gothic in Canadian and Australian Fiction*, Brussels: Peter Lang, 2009. 259pp.
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Gerry Turcotte's *Peripheral Fear: Transformations of the Gothic in Canadian and Australian Fiction* is comprised of a series of articles originally produced and published in the early 1990s. Presented here for the first time in a single volume, they represent the basis for Turcotte's extensive writings on the Gothic over the past twenty years. In a sense, the book itself is already a kind of historical document. It shows the development of an early framework for thinking about the hauntings, isolation, disorientation, terror and other manifestations of the Gothic that drive so much colonial and postcolonial literary production. Arguably, it came at a time before the exploration of the anxieties and disturbances of settlement on the national literary cultures of Australia and Canada had grown into a significant preoccupation in contemporary literary studies.

Perhaps it is partly to retain a sense of its original context that Turcotte has decided to limit the book's contents to those essays produced around the one period. It is unclear how much new writing has gone into shaping the collection into a coherent volume—presumably this has involved at least providing a new introduction and conclusion. Introducing too much new material may have sat uncomfortably with the original pieces. But a final chapter giving some kind of further engagement with the more recent studies in the field that are mentioned in the acknowledgements section—such as Michael Hurley's book on the fiction of John Richardson, *The Borders of Nightmare* and Andrew McCann's *Marcus Clarke's Bohemia*—may have also helped to clinch the significance and continuing relevance of this interesting work.

Some kind of final commentary, looking back on these writings from today's perspective might also have worked as an opportunity to highlight and draw out some of the important implications that emerge in the body of the book, such as a comment at the beginning of chapter four describing the appropriation of the discourses of imperialism by colonial Gothic texts, 'so that the barbarity of the colonising process—of colonising the people of the New Worlds, for example—can be either accounted for, condoned or condemned.' Though not really developed any further in the chapter, this comment represents an early acknowledgement of the imbrication of the Gothic with colonial frontier violence, one that anticipates the way narratives of violence have continued to unfold in postcolonial Gothic writings, such as Kate Grenville's *The Secret River*.

But even without providing a more recent context for thinking about the colonial Gothic *Peripheral Fear* has a great deal to offer contemporary readers. It begins with a scrupulous genealogy of the Gothic in the Old

World, elaborating the broader historical and intellectual context from which it emerged during the eighteenth century. Turcotte describes an England that seemed in many ways to be divided along class, political, and philosophical lines, commenting that ‘it is not surprising at all that, at such a time, Gothic fiction, with its peculiar embodiment of the major tensions of the age—the moral and didactic, the sensational and grotesque—should have proved popular.’ The chapter provides a detailed reading of the existing field of Gothic studies as well as cataloguing the types of terror to be found there. Particularly notable is the manner in which the evolution of the Gothic’s popularity as a literary genre is traced, partly through its movement from a form that invoked a kind of nostalgia for the medieval, to one that embraced an ambience of terror. William Hazlitt’s familiar description of Ann Radcliffe’s writings as ‘harrowing up the soul with imaginary horrors, and making the flesh creep, and the nerves thrill’ is quoted here to enjoyable effect, reflecting more generally the kinds of entertaining morsels that appear throughout the book.

Chapter Two moves into colonial territories, charting the arrival of the Gothic in the New World and the manner in which it readily adapted to the colonial setting, despite its apparent reliance on the castle ruins and gloomy historical ambience of the Old World. Turcotte notes the close affinity that exists between Gothic discourses and colonial literatures, writing that ‘ideas of isolation, estrangement, disorientation, doubleness of vision and of the search for the reconstructed self are all aspects of the Gothic generally and of the Colonial Gothic specifically.’ The importance of landscape and the perceived lack of a historical past are highlighted, with strange new wildernesses providing the key to the kinds of spatial oppressions, loss of identity and fear of annihilation so crucial to the colonial Gothic. At the heart of this discussion is Freud’s notion of the uncanny, and if Freud’s essay has become a commonplace of writings on the colonial Gothic since the original publication of Turcotte’s article, his analysis nonetheless rehearses its significance to the colonial Gothic in a clear and helpful manner.

The third chapter explores the emergence of the Gothic in early Canadian and Australian novels within the context of an informative discussion of Gothic architecture showing the way that the adoption of Gothic modes provided a means for transporting significant emblems of the Old World into the Antipodean setting. The chapter shows Gothic architecture to have been significantly transformed in the colonial setting—as exemplified vividly by the appearance of a kangaroo gargoyle on one of the main turrets of the University of Sydney. The Gothic possibilities inherent to the penal colony are, of course, foregrounded here, illustrated with a fascinating ‘metaphor for political subversion’: an anecdote of convict stonemasons who intentionally cut sandstone used to construct new Gothic structures incorrectly in order to hasten their decay (so that the monumental buildings were, in a sense, ruins already).

The fourth chapter, ‘Three Nineteenth Century Gothic Novels: *Wacousta*, *His Natural Life* and *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*’, along with the four chapters that make up the ‘postcolonial’ section of the book are all text-focussed studies, comparing novels by Australian and Canadian authors and working cumulatively to contrast the literary production of these different settler nations over a lengthy time-period. Notable aspects of these diverse discussions include an analysis of Patrick White’s conflicted relationship to Old World Gothic through his autobiography, *Flaws in the Glass*, and a reading of Kate Grenville’s complex use of Gothic discourses in ways which sometimes operate to satirise the Gothic, but which nonetheless retain its subversive potential. A passion for the subversive possibilities of the Gothic is what seems to drive *Peripheral Fear*, and a view to the genre’s inherent open-endedness is maintained throughout, all the while its tropes and strategies are being carefully unpacked.

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