

*Haunted Landscapes: Super-Nature and the Environment*

**Ruth Heholt and Niamh Downing (editors)**

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*'a ghost is the sound of our steps through a ruined cloister'* (p.1).

Through the lens of Vernon Lee, the late-nineteenth/early-twentieth century writer of supernatural fiction, Ruth Heholt opens this text with a clear link between the supernatural and the landscape. Of course, Heholt writes, there are multiple types of ghosts, and multiple landscapes in which they make themselves known, but this simple image of a ghost in a ruin illustrates the key message of the book: the ghost *is* the landscape. Through an examination of affect theory, Derrida's non-representational theory, and the theory of multiplicities, Heholt's introduction challenges the most basic accepted readings of ghosts as 'the return of the repressed', highlighting instead the many layers of ghosts and landscapes to be developed in the book. Intersections between 'space, place, the human, the spectral, the supernatural and the haunted' (p.2) are all deconstructed to illustrate that the juxtapositions between spectral/material, mental/concrete, absence/presence, visible/invisible, alive/dead, here/there, natural/supernatural (p.13) are false and limit our scholarly understanding of the supernatural.

To explore this fascinating and worthwhile topic a range of texts, time periods and theories are drawn upon – from novels, poems and films, and works from the nineteenth century to the present day; while the overarching theorises utilized in the essays themselves range from

‘landscape studies, affect theory, film studies, folklore, trauma studies and postcolonial theory’ (p.2). *Haunted Landscape*’s target audience is mainly academics and students, though with the reasonable pricing of the text, anyone interested in all things supernatural will find lots to stimulate enthusiasm for the topic.

Heholt and Downing have organized their book into three sections: ‘Landscapes of Trauma’, ‘Inner and (Sub)Urban Landscapes’ and ‘Borderlands and Outlands’ – progressively getting more liminal as we continue through the text. Section 1 outlines how landscapes are indelibly marked and therefore haunted by the past. Chapters 1 and 2 examine the Holocaust, with Mark Riley’s chapter on Paul Celan’s poem and Martin Heidegger’s hut detailing the fractures and erasures in both of their ‘real’ lives in order to argue that the hut’s terrain opens meditations on a location’s multiple histories and interpretations. Matilda Mroz’s essay examines Władysław Pasikowski’s *Aftermath* (2012) and Guillermo Del Toro’s *The Devil’s Backbone* (2001) from a Derridian perspective on cinema, arguing that the Holocaust, Poland and the Spanish Civil War continually rupture to reveal ‘essential unknowing’ (p.55). In the third essay in the collection, Ryan Trimm argues that contemporary British home spaces still resonate with the ghosts of empire making them places of anxiety regarding the past and present. Finally in this section, co-editor Niamh Downing’s chapter examines the ecological uncanny of a murdered couple in Jim Crace’s *Being Dead* (1999), stating that their corpses become uncanny sites of materiality as *memento vitae*, rather than *memento mori*.

Section 2 focuses specifically on ghosts and hauntings of (sub)urban landscapes. In Chapter 5, Karl Bell discusses haunted Victorian English cities and how these spaces are affected by ghost lore, memory, imagination and feeling. Kevin Corstorphine’s essay on the intertextuality between Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) and Richard Matheson’s *Hell House* (1971) reveals how masculinity affects domesticity, nationality and their attendant crises in the novels. HollyGale Millette’s essay explores Whitechapel as the site

of the Jack the Ripper murders – specifically as a gendered space. She argues Whitechapel has been mythologized and fictionalized into normalising violence against women in the present day. Finally in this section, Rosario Arias' essay discusses the Neo-Victorian novel *The Realm of Shells* (2006) by Sonia Overall and how this text operates as a channel for material embodied connections between past and present.

Section 3 extends the discussion to the margins and 'othered' spaces, even within the Gothic. Daniel Weston's essay challenges readers to 'turn away' from the impact of W. G. Sebald's work in order to be truer to the spirit of his work. Alison O'Malley-Younger and Colin Younger's essay focuses on the liminal space of the Anglo-Scot border through supernatural ballads and argues that this excluded geographical space emanates from the landscape itself, rather than the literature written about it. In Chapter 11, Rebecca Lloyd discusses children's films – specifically Chris Butler and Sam Fell's *ParaNorman* (2012) and Henry Selick's *Coraline* (2009) – and how child protagonists navigate the difficult Gothic terrain in order to find a home that is habitable. The final essay of the collection, William Hughes's chapter on Bram Stoker, argues that scholarship on Stoker needs to address his Irishness, as well as his London-based context and applies this to Stoker's novel *The Snake Pass* (1890). Overall, the essays in this collection are far reaching in their scope, complex in their theoretical underpinning, and detailed in their textual analysis, critically expanding the study of Gothic landscapes to its outermost reaches.

The text, however, does not end here. It is the 'Afterword' of the text that (undergraduate) students of the Gothic will find most useful. In it, Heholt fills a potential gap by discussing canonical Gothic literature in light of the text's overarching themes. Starting with Romanticism, Heholt discusses William Wordsworth's poetry, specifically *The Prelude* (1799), moves onto Ann Radcliffe and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and ends with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). This chronological overview of more traditional early Gothic texts, i.e.

ones taught in undergraduate courses, is vital in fulfilling students' needs and Heholt and Downing could have flagged this up more clearly for their readers with a subtitle to the 'Afterword' – something like 'Afterword: Early Gothic Literature and its Haunted Landscapes'. *Haunted Landscapes: Super-Nature and the Environment* is a valuable contribution to Gothic, landscape and environment, and literary/film studies, as well as offering everyone from undergraduate students to Professors an exciting and much needed intervention in the field.