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Edmundson, Melissa. *Women's Colonial Gothic Writing, 1850-1930: Haunted Empire*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2018. 265 pgs.

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<1>*Women's Colonial Gothic Writing, 1850-1930: Haunted Empire* is a comprehensive study of ten Anglophone colonial women writing during high empire, for whom the gothic genre and its conventions provides an especially apt lens for understanding the valences of their work. Many of these ten women writers have previously not been examined as gothic writers, which is what makes this book both unique and useful. The book brings the gothic's focus on fear and death to discussions of settlement and colonization, to better analyze the often-submerged discussion of the violence of transplantation. The author, Melissa Edmundson, argues that by reading the selection of texts that she highlights as gothic, readers can better understand how these ten women were complicating or in some cases resisting empire and the plight of colonial and settler women. This book's ten case studies together make a strong argument that the buried traumas of colonization would be expressed through the gothic and that by employing the gothic lens we can better see women writers complicating the narrative of successful colonization expressed elsewhere, especially in the writing of colonial men.

<2>The book is organized into 12 chapters, each examining the work of one late 19th-early 20th century female writer, bracketed by an introduction and conclusion that do the majority of the work connecting the authors. Readers of *19th Century Gender Studies* will find in this study a thorough analysis of texts from the ten women that the author argues fit under the broad umbrella of the gothic. In this way, *Women's Colonial Gothic Writing, 1850-1930: Haunted Empire* contributes to the study of each female writer and also the understanding of how the gothic was different for 19th and early 20th-century female writers than for male writers, especially for female settlers who were managing the trauma of displacement, isolation, and in some cases real violence from men. The strength of the book—its thorough examination of each woman's work—however, is also its weakness. The book's organization by writer means that connections among the chapters and analysis of the women's gothic commonalities and what those mean for an understanding of post/colonial writing are backgrounded. What does it mean that ten women involved in imperial expansion employed the gothic genre as a tool of resistance? What does this analysis help us to understand, especially, about how these women used the gothic to manage the trauma of participating in the oppression, dispossession, and genocide of indigenous peoples? A text with these connections foregrounded would make an excellent subsequent project.

<3>*Women's Colonial Gothic Writing, 1850-1930: Haunted Empire* is useful for scholars with postcolonial or global studies interests, however, in its bringing into conversation well-studied and overlooked authors of different national backgrounds and different relationships to

colonization. Some of the women examined were settlers. Some were explorers, and others were colonizers in other ways. In each case, Edmundson traces how the supernatural, ghostly, and gothic manifests in each author's work, in some more pronounced than in others. Most of these texts, Edmundson argues, when read in terms of gothic elements and their imperial critique, are more complicated than they might be assumed by critics or than other popular literature of the day.

<4>Though Edmundson doesn't make such a division, one could read book in two halves. A theme of the first half might be the works of female writers that employ gothic elements and topics to undermine a sense of imperial superiority. After an introductory chapter laying out the book's themes and aims, the second chapter analyzes the work of Canadian settler Suzannah Moodie, who, Edmundson argues, writes about her settling of the Canadian bush using the language of mourning and terror. The third chapter focuses on Isabella Valancy Crawford, another Canadian settler who supported her family as a professional writer of gothic romances but who also, Edmundson shows, reimagined the passive gothic female heroine into a more active female hero, thereby resisting imperial patriarchy. The fourth chapter focuses on British author, Florence Marryat (daughter of celebrated imperial author Captain Marryat), whose most famous work portrays a mixed-race vampire, which Edmundson argues is a gothic examination of colonial hybridity from a sympathetic vein, thereby resisting notions of hybridity as a danger. The fifth chapter focuses on the well-studied traveler Mary Kingsley and two essays that anthropologically study African spiritualism and folklore, which Edmundson argues, undermine the presentation of African spiritualism as Other, occult, and superstition, thus subverting arguments for colonial superiority. The sixth chapter reads the work of British popular writer, Margery Lawrence, whose three short stories set in Africa use the supernatural to critique colonialism.

<5>The book's second half might be said to focus on women who use gothic themes to undermine a sense of imperial stability. Chapter seven begins with Irish writer Bithia Mary Croker, who moved with her soldier husband to India, where she wrote novels and stories about the British imperial presence, focusing on ghosts, murders, and violence that, Edmundson argues, disrupt the British sense of order and control. Chapter eight reads Alice Perrin who, like Croker, wrote Anglo-Indian ghost stories, though hers featured animals as important devices to subtly question the established order of the imperial strata and note problems caused by the imperial British. Chapter nine focuses on the Australian author Mary Fortune who pseudonymously published detective stories about murdered women and their subsequent ghosts, which, Edmundson says, highlight the instability of the Australian settlement and unsettle its reputation as a land of riches and success. Chapter ten next reads well-studied Australian writer Barbara Baynton's book *Bush Stories* in terms of the murder, revenge, and other gothic elements that are especially prevalent in the first and last stories' portrayal of the rural female settler's life and which undermine the narrative of resilience found elsewhere. The final female writer analyzed is the New Zealand author Katherine Mansfield, whose "gothically inspired" stories, as Edmundson calls them, were a means of "of exorcising her own self-professed hatred for New Zealand after her relocation to London" (217-218).

<6>A final merit of *Women's Colonial Gothic Writing, 1850-1930: Haunted Empire* is the broad cross national Anglophone comparison it draws among the ten women authors—some

transplants to Canada (Moodie, Crawford), New Zealand (Mansfield), and Australia (Baynton, Fortune); others travelers (Kingsley); others involved in empire from the home front (Marryat, Lawrence); and still others living in the colonies but not as settlers (Croker, Perrin). The book's detailed explanation of the biographies of and prior critical conversation about of each author is admirable. It would have been useful, however, to have these chapters grouped, either geographically, chronologically, by theme, or by colonial situation to more clearly trace the argumentative threads woven through the book and so that each chapter clearly builds on the one before. The book's overall argument—that in each case the gothic is used to problematize the female experience within colonialism or to problematize colonial ideology and the male-authored narrative of conquest—provides a useful grounding for a further study, perhaps more focused on class and race and perhaps tracing biographical and textual connections between the women themselves. Were the women reading each other's writing and mutually involved in a female gothic project? Or were they individually responding to male gothic texts in similar ways?

<7>Overall, the strength of *Women's Colonial Gothic Writing, 1850-1930: Haunted Empire*, in addition to its careful reading of ten women as colonial gothic case studies, is its careful attention to the gothic genre, which is significant in an imprint of the Palgrave Gothic monograph series. Some of the ten women explicitly wrote old fashioned tales of ghosts, haunted spaces, murders, and monsters (Crawford, Marryat, Croker, Perrin, Fortune). Others wrote about topics that would be considered Gothic in order to challenge that ideal (Kingsley, Lawrence). Some wrote about their settler or colonizer experience in a way that Edmundson argues is gothic in tone and theme (Moodie, Baynton, Mansfield). But overall, as Edmundson argued, the gothic genre and its focus on what can't be seen but what is nonetheless present and demanding to be recognized, is important and useful for better understanding the screams beneath the silences of colonialism.