



# Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic

By Cynthia Sugars, Gerry Turcotte

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*Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic* examines how Canadian writers have combined a postcolonial awareness with gothic metaphors of monstrosity and haunting in their response to Canadian history. The essays gathered here range from treatments of early postcolonial gothic expression in Canadian literature to attempts to define a Canadian postcolonial gothic mode. Many of these texts wrestle with Canada's colonial past and with the voices and histories that were repressed in the push for national consolidation but emerge now as uncanny reminders of that contentious history. The haunting effect can be unsettling and enabling at the same time.

In recent years, many Canadian authors have turned to the gothic to challenge dominant literary, political, and social narratives. In Canadian literature, the "postcolonial gothic" has been put to multiple uses, above all to figure experiences of ambivalence that have emerged from a colonial context and persisted into the present. As these essays demonstrate, formulations of a Canadian postcolonial gothic differ radically from one another, depending on the social and cultural positioning of who is positing it. Given the preponderance, in colonial discourse, of accounts that demonize otherness, it is not surprising that many minority writers have avoided gothic metaphors. In recent years, however, minority authors have shown an interest in the gothic, signalling an emerging critical discourse. This "spectral turn" sees minority writers reversing long-standing characterizations of their identity as "monstrous" or invisible in order to show their connections to and disconnection from stories of the nation.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

“It is a truism that collections of literary criticism are a mixed bag. The editors put out a call, and then whatever comes in comes in. Thus many such collections are at best inconsistent and at worst useless. I am very glad to say this is not the case with *Unsettled Remains*.” (Terry Goldie *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Volume 80, number 2, Spring 2011)

“Cynthia Sugars' and Gerry Turcotte's *Unsettled Remains* is an essential read for the student of Canadian postcolonial literature.... Through their engagement with Canada's 'haunted' colonial history, [the contributors] draw attention to the interplay between the uncanny and the unsettling in Canada's settler-invader history. Consequently, the 'settler-invader' perspective is incorporated into a dialogue that includes the voices of indigenous and immigrant communities as well. By opening their readings of literary texts to such a dialogue, these critics challenge traditional representations and interpretations of the landscape and its peoples without denying Canada's turbulent colonial history. Traditional models of 'haunting, monstrosity, trauma, fear' (p. 98) are likewise scrutinised, resulting in a uniquely Canadian re-visioning of gothic convention.” (Sharon Selby *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, 23.2)

“The essays in *Unsettled Remains* focus on how subjective and national identities in Canadian literature have been formed through notions of interiority and unsettlement, and through the haunting necessarily inherent in a postcolonial context: through what Sugars and Turcotte name as Gothic 'experiences of spectrality and the uncanny'. Monsters, ghosts, tricksters, and other supernatural characters figure prominently in all of the volume's essays, therefore, as metaphors of the many repressed histories brought on by our colonial past, and as representations of the ability for 'monstrous' others to 'talk back' to dominant narratives.” (Heather Latimer *Canadian Literature*, 208, Spring 2011)

“[Each chapter] seeks to find ways of knowing, articulating, and memorializing the horrors of the past and to account for their haunting trace in the present in a meaningful and ethical way' (Shelley Kulperger). This consistency gives the volume momentum as it proceeds, as its essays often draw on the same sources although not always to reach the same conclusions. Its admirable goals of disclosure, redress, and healing are sought not just in the novels studied?the novel is the favourite form?but through the perspicacity of critics who untwist the stories' twisted, gothic shapes and put them to therapeutic use, 'doing a certain kind of cultural cathartic work, enabling Canadians to speak the crime that has no name' (Cynthia Sugars).... The value of the collection is in exploring [its] assumptions so rigorously, in showing that something truly is at stake in studying gothic forms. The essays are also admirable individually: all are closely argued, earnest, well-documented, and scholarly.” (Jon Kertzer *English Studies in Canada*, 35 #4, 2009)

“*Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic* is a strong anthology.... [I]ts essays...are inherently conversant in the uncanny fashion that is the focus and foundation of their origins. In this anthology Sugars and Turcotte bring together an admirable range of writers, whose various positions allow voice and space to many of the “uncanny reminders of [Canada's] problematic history.” (Erin Wunker *The Dalhousie Review*, Spring 2010)

“Rigorously selected and effectively argued, these essays convincingly demonstrate the eerie presence of a Gothic sensibility in Canadian literature refracted through a postcolonial lens, in many cases drawing attention to little-studied, extremely contemporary texts.... *Unsettled Remains* provides a broad survey of the

postcolonial Gothic in contemporary Canadian literature; while certain themes and theoretical approaches are bound to recur, such as the image of the ghost, haunting, trauma, and Catholicism, with contributors invoking Freud's uncanny, Kristeva's abject, the postcolonial theories of Fanon, Bhabha, Said, and Anderson as well as the writings on trauma of Caruth and La Capra, there is also a great deal of variety in theoretical approaches and certainly in the range of primary texts analyzed. For too many US readers perhaps, the Canadian itself stands in the position of the uncanny?that which is familiar but different; *Unsettled Remains* offers a challenging but engaging gateway not only into Canadian literature, but it also provides useful discussions of both Gothic and postcolonial theory. As Andrews asserts about *Monkey Beach*, '[a]pproaching Robinson's text through the Gothic is especially helpful for drawing readers beyond the Haisla community into an unfamiliar and mysterious world ripe with imaginative possibilities because it is a familiar set of conventions' (223), we might say that *Unsettled Remains* offers scholars of the fantastic a similar entry into the all-too-often unexplored territory of 'CanLit.'" (Amy J. Ransom *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2012)

#### About the Author

**Cynthia Sugars** is a professor of English at the University of Ottawa, where she teaches Canadian literature. She is the author of *Canadian Gothic: Literature, History, and the Spectre of Self-Invention* (2014) and is the editor of numerous essay collections, including *The Oxford Handbook of Canadian Literature* (forthcoming 2015); *Canadian Literature and Cultural Memory* (with Eleanor Ty, 2014); *Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the postcolonial Gothic* (with Gerry Turcotte; WLU Press, 2009); and the historical anthology *Canadian Literature in English: Texts and Contexts* (with Laura Moss, 2009). With Herb Wyile, she is currently the co-editor of *Studies in Canadian Literature*.

**Gerry Turcotte** is the executive dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, University of Notre Dame, Sydney. He is the past president of the Association for Canadian Studies in Australia and New Zealand (ACSANZ), past secretary of the International Council for Canadian Studies (ICCS), and founding director of the Centre for Canadian-Australian Studies (CCAS). He is the author of numerous books.

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