

## **Gothic Travel through Haunted Landscapes: Climates of Fear (Book review)**

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**Gothic Travel through Haunted Landscapes: Climates of Fear**, by Lucie Armitt and Scott Brewster, London and New York, Anthem Press, 2023, vii + 184 pp., (US)\$125, £80 (Hardback), ISBN 978-1-839-98021-3.

Though the authors locate the genesis for *Gothic Travel through Haunted Landscapes* in specific shared and personal pasts, more recent events – Brexit, the migrant crisis, impending ecological disaster, and COVID-19 – give shape to this critical rumination. While the title suggests travel more broadly, the text focuses resolutely on walking and its relation to landscape – some of the discussion brings in train and car travel, it is walking that Armitt and Brewster position as both the action that *haunts* and the activity of the *haunted*. Over five chapters, the discussion ranges across the archipelago of the UK and Ireland and beyond these borders and into the regions of more dangerous walking: the Arctic expanses where Franklin’s expedition walked into death and the Himalayas, the site of historical and contemporary travels with tragic results. In all cases, the focus is not on pleasant rambles, or even contemplative Romantic wandering. Landscapes, in this text, are never neutral, never unimpacted by human perception and activity. Similarly, walking may be ‘distracted’ (131), but nonetheless, it enables critical reflection even where such intellectual pursuits are not the explicit purpose. Attentive to the connection between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ weather, Armitt and Brewster tune their analysis and discussion to questions of movement, environment, ecology, and impact. Moving fluidly across disparate geographies, the authors demonstrate connections – via walking – between historical and contemporary Gothic explorations of the natural world.

The genre is important here: this is not about simply walking, an activity that has a prominent role in literature and criticism. This is not interested in the nineteenth-century *flâneur* or the psychogeographer, both of which privilege the impact of a particular space on the observer. Armitt and Brewster are more invested in the reciprocity between travellers and the places and spaces through which they travel. The Gothic is precisely the genre in which haunting itself, already a deeply riven and contested concept, is further explored, traversed, and remapped. If ‘Gothic’ is already a critically haunted term (etymologically through the connection to the long-vanished ‘Goths; critically through the history of the genre in scholarship; literally through the preoccupation with ghosts), haunting itself is subjected to similar treatment. To ‘haunt’ carries with it a sense of familiarity (to ‘haunt’ a café is to be a regular; places are ‘haunted’ by regular – and even much-loved – spirits) as well as the more expected uncanniness of ghosts. Travel makes the traveller spectral, in the sense of impermanence and intangibility in a space, and the object of speculation (and sometimes fear) for residents. Travellers likewise can be confident if temporary inhabitants of a space or fearful, easily disoriented without the deeper knowledge of a place available to permanent inhabitants. More broadly, determining the ‘haunted’ status of a place also includes recognizing that *humans*, whether mobile or stationary, might be the ghosts, a move that acknowledges the deep impact of the Anthropocene and our own permanent traces of temporary presence(s).

Peregrination is a core concept throughout this book, with its connotations of ‘pilgrimage’ but also duration – a peregrination is not a postprandial stroll, nor a brisk constitutional. Unlike ‘wandering’, though, peregrination suggests a more defined purpose,

an intention to connect places through travel – or, as here, through an ambitious and generous discursive itinerary. In chapter 1, an eco-critical reading of Shelley's *Frankenstein* starts off the intellectual journey grounded in the British Gothic tradition, but also in a period of increasing cultural fascination in Britain with the frozen polar regions. The challenge of these landscapes changes the ways they can be travelled. Walking gives way to 'creeping', a 'form of perambulation carrying especially sinister implications' (42); creeping begins to describe the landscape itself, beginning here with descriptions of sea-ice in narratives from Shelley, Poe, John W. Campbell, and Michelle Paver. Creeping then provides the route 'home' – accompanied by that monster, climate change – to a consideration of the very different landscape of England's East Coast, a space already 'post-apocalyptic in its extremity', unstable and dissolving (44). We can step from one chapter to the next, from sea-ice and invasive sea waters to coastal saltmarshes in chapter 2, forewarned that the landscape is still deadly. However well-mapped, novels from Dickens to Kate Mosse explore and exploit watery geographies and their uncanny ability to 'exhume buried tales' (69). Shifting ground drives the discussion to the edges of Britain and Ireland in chapter 3, which journeys to western and coastal Ireland, the Welsh borders, and the Scottish Highlands and Islands through texts ranging from eighteenth-century British Gothic to Alice Thompson's *Pharos* (2002) and *The Falconer* (2008).

Restless and still wandering even at 'home', chapter 3 ('At the Edge: Gothic Extremities in Britain and Ireland') is the most acutely, if obliquely, prescient in a world in which the ease of travel beyond national borders cannot be taken for granted, even by those for whom privilege had come with unquestioned freedom of movement. The late eighteenth century 'Picturesque Tour' offered an alternative for wealthy travellers for whom Europe had become inaccessible (or too risky); the 'staycation', which entered the OED in 2010, now offers travellers ways of explaining more local travel in a world of increasing economic, environmental, and political threats. William Hughes's concept of 'regional Gothic' is useful here to destabilise restrictive and biased assumptions about centres and margins. 'Edgelands', in Armitt and Brewster's readings of Walter Scott, Arthur Machen, James Hogg, and Robert Louis Stevenson, emerge as places of multiple and shifting identities created in response not only to political or national 'centres' but also to other regions.

As they point out in the introduction and develop in the final chapter ('Walking Abroad: Ghosts and Landscape'), ghost walks and ghostwalking both anticipate and negate hauntings. Ghost *sightings* – even in their usual haunts – are not part of the promise of ghost walks. As Armitt and Brewster note, *seeing* ghosts is no longer the point: ghost walks often point out where ghosts were seen, rather than first-hand accounts of ghostly interactions. And of course, as they note about the connection between spectrality and trains, ghosts seem to be *not* in any given place more often than they are in it (85). As communal undertakings, ghost walks, with their accompanying professional storytellers become a 'considered search for heightened...understanding' (130) of the connections between present and past, living and dead, human and more-than-human worlds. More intriguingly, Armitt and Brewster posit an embodied genre – the Gothic has escaped again, slipping out of text and into the lived experience of Anthropocene spaces. While ghosts in the twentieth century are 'primarily a textual problem', a 'conceptual challenge for literary realism' (130), the ghost walk provides a new discursive space. Ghost walks are thus the new 'peripatetic Gothic' (129), a new ritual

of walking (usually) urban circuits to mark out places that no longer exist (or no longer exist in the same way).

The seemingly obvious early observation that it is ‘the living, not the dead, who determine whether or not a space is haunted’ (3) becomes an increasingly important ethical point driving the argument: who counts as ‘living’ and who, therefore, has the power to determine the haunted status of a space? While there is some acknowledgement of the tension between ‘residents’ and ‘travellers’, the discussion assumes that travellers are *free* to travel as and where they desire. The opening sets out the genesis of the project in personal terms and, initially, aligns ‘we’ with the authors; however, as the discussion develops, the ‘we’ becomes less clearly identifiable. This is particularly evident when the argument turns to environmental change and climate crisis. In chapter 1, they excuse ‘us’ from not perceiving the ‘(at the time [1999]...unknowable) tidal wave of terror’ that led to 9/11 but insist that ‘we should perhaps have recognised, much earlier, the environmental catastrophe’ in the making. In both cases, this is a Discussing literary representations of the Antarctica, for example, they note that ‘we have been guilty of equal complacency’