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*Elbert, Monika and Bridget M. Marshall, eds. **Transnational Gothic. Literary and Social Exchanges in the Long Nineteenth Century.** Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013. Hb. xi, 269pp., £ 54.00. ISBN: 978-1-4094-4770-2.*

The handsomely bound and carefully copy-edited collection of fourteen essays under review here serves as a good introduction to much that is wrong with the state of scholarly publishing today. This is not to say that there are no redeeming features; like the curate's egg, some parts of it are excellent, but they are so in their own right, not as part of a wider dialogue one once had the right to expect.

The collection seems to have come into being following a panel of the American Literature Association, as one may deduce from a note of thanks in the acknowledgements, but no further reference is made to that event or any exchanges that may have occurred there. None of the contributors cross-references the chapters by the others and the introduction by the two editors does little to integrate what follows beyond grouping the essays under four headings: "Old World Gothic and the New World Frontier," "Gothic Catholicism," "Anglo-American Genre Exchanges: Beyond the Novel," and "Social Anxieties and Hauntings." The essay titles themselves freely make use of "transnational,"

“transcultural,” and “transatlantic.” In the absence of an initial, satisfactory definition of “transnational” (as opposed to, say, “international,” “global,” “negating the idea of nationality” and so on) this is only to be expected. In fact, what the term means in all but two essays here is “American, influenced by British phenomena and persons,” or, in the case of Keith B. Mitchell’s “All This Difficult Darkness: Lynching and the Exorcism of the Black Other in Theodore Dreiser’s ‘Nigger Jeff,’” just “American.” Mitchell, in an essay that is learned and subtle, illustrates the dilemma such a publishing-driven collection poses for a scholar who needs to be read: He nods to the key terms once or twice in his first and last paragraphs, states that slavery was full of horrors (that takes care of “Gothic”) and involved the middle passage (the Black Atlantic) and then gets on with what he was going to do at any rate.

In the hands of established Gothic scholars like Monika Elbert and Diane Long Hoeveler, who both address and reevaluate the seemingly inimical representation of “Catholicism” in British and above all American Gothic, such definitional dilemmas become negligible, and their essays on “The Paradox of Catholicism in New England’s Women’s Gothic” and “Demonizing the Catholic Other: Religion and the Secularization Process in Gothic Literature”, respectively, are well-crafted. They share, together with Nancy F. Sweet’s “A Woman with a Cross: The Transgressive, Transnational Nun in Anti-Catholic Fiction,” a curious reluctance to differentiate between Catholicism (hence the inverted commas above) and the Catholic Church. It seems to me that the Church, its practices and its practitioners, have come to replace, in secular terms, the sublime of traditional romantic fiction, that which is loathed and desired at the same time, not merely the abject but the *fascinosum et tremendum* of its own theologians. The attraction and liberating force the authors see in their texts might thus be accounted for.

There are other fine chapters to be introduced below, but too many take any appearance of a ghost or a graveyard as evidence of the Gothic genre (or mode? Not everybody comes clean on that), and any trip abroad as a hallmark of transnationalism. Melissa Wehler provides a striking example of this tendency in “The Haunted Transatlantic Libertine: Edmund Kean’s American Tour,” the story of how Kean, a celebrated British actor, in 1821 dug up his compatriot and fellow Thespian George Frederick Cooke in a New York cemetery in order to look at him and repatriate his right index finger. A splendid story, no doubt, but even coupled with references to Gothic plays either actor did appear or might have appeared in, and seen in the context of “ghosting,” a term coined by Marvin Carlson in 2001 to refer to the continued influence of past performances, it does not amount to a sustained engagement with the Gothic. As a piece of biography, however, it is very good.

Other chapters address captivity narratives and other frontier texts, and one (Daniel Robinson’s “Gothic Prosody: Monkish Perversity and the Poetics of Weird

Form”) subjects Gothic verse narratives to detailed metrical analysis. None is devoid of interest and insight, with the exception of Roxanne Harde’s “‘At rest now:’ Child Ghosts and Social Justice in Nineteenth-Century Women’s Writing,” a farrago of paragraphs introduced almost invariably by the formula “Derrida somewhere says that ghosts/spectres/others do/claim/refute x” and followed by a paraphrase from a literary text that may or may not have a bearing on x. There is neither argument nor coherence, nor a justification of their absence. The noble and fecund project of deconstruction here, at least, has degenerated to name-dropping and free association; no other chapter so much as mentions Derrida.

Significantly, the best contributions take the term “transnational” seriously, transcend the narrow purview of North American reception of Gothic-associated ideas and motifs, and move to the Caribbean, India, and Japan. “‘Duppy Know Who Fi Frighten:’ Laying Ghosts in Jamaican Fiction” by Candace Ward takes three novels by white Creole authors from different periods of Jamaica’s history to show how the duppy, the malevolent ghost of Jamaican folk narratives and by extension the trauma of slavery, can be raised, addressed and banished by fiction that takes over and thus diminishes the duppy’s power. Bob Marley, in a song not quoted here, assigned to music and the musician the role of “Duppy Conqueror;” the same claim is made here for literature.

Wider still is the range of Mary Goodwin’s “Stranger Fiction: The Asian Ghost Tales of Rudyard Kipling and Lafcadio Hearn,” a comparative analysis of Anglo-Indian and Anglo-Japanese Gothic that concludes the collection. The focus is on Hearn, who eventually took Japanese citizenship and whose transnational recasting of the Gothic yields staggering results: “For Hearn, the Gothic mode was a passageway toward spiritual development and moral improvement; a code of responsibility and discipline, rather than a raging unbridled passion and the extremes of emotion that clutter the landscape in Western Gothic writing” (248). From this perspective, the volume’s earlier transnationalist subjects appear anglocentric and almost monolithic: a nice and necessary subversive flourish.

The real problem with collections such as this is that they bury material that in other, more precisely defined or created contexts would be mutually enriching and illuminating. Computer-aided retrieval systems may help the individual reader to find an article no matter where it is located, but what hope is there for the dialogue of scholars who even in a dedicated book find neither common ground nor the opportunity and means to search for it?