Ivonne M. García, *Gothic Geoculture: Nineteenth-Century Representations of Cuba in the Transamerican Imaginary*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2019. x + 170 pp. (Cloth US\$ 59.95)

Cuba has long held an ambivalent place in the popular imagination of the United States—both desired and constantly out of reach, exotic and alarmingly close, infantilized and eroticized, seen as a paradise and inferno, as well as a space of exhilarating freedom and dangerous racial mixing. Building on this contradictory positioning, *Gothic Geoculture* explores the image of Cuba as a gothic double of the United States, expressed through tropes of fear and monstrosity in nineteenth-century literature. Through examination of these gothicized representations of the island, and in particular of slavery and its legacies on the island, Ivonne García explores how both U.S. and Cuban writers “drew on the gothic to represent Cuba either as dangerous and/or as imperiled,” thus simultaneously cautioning against or advocating for U.S. imperialism (p. 5). She argues that such gothicized representations of Cuba invoke a “gothic geoculture,” a term she uses to refer to the geosocial construct “that served to codify the system of slavery in this hemisphere, and which represented race, gender, and nationality as imbricated categories that imposed epistemological (constructed) and ontological (inherent) meanings on colonially subalternized locations, such as Cuba” (p. 6).

Situating the book within a transamerican perspective, García defines and explores a major component of this “gothic geoculture” in each chapter. Chapter 1 explores the representation of Cuba as a “corruptive gothiscape” in the literature of William Cullen Bryant and Nathaniel Parker Willis, whereby the island’s landscape, culture, and inhabitants are linked by a geoculture of slavery that infects and degrades anything it touches. Chapter 2 looks at how Martin R. Delany and Louisa May Alcott fashioned “gothicized souths,” connecting Cuba and the U.S. South as spaces similarly gothicized by slavery. In Chapter 3, García discusses her idea of “transgressive hauntings”—anxieties about transgressions of gender roles and norms, especially for White women empowered by the geoculture of slavery in Cuba—and shows how they appeared in the life and writings of Sophia Peabody and her sister, Mary Peabody Mann.

Shifting perspectives, the next two chapters consider how Cuban writers engaged with the image of Cuba as the gothic double of the United States. Chapter 4 examines how *Cecilia Valdés* and *The Story of Evangelina Cisneros, Told by Herself* both promoted and challenged a “gothic emplotment” of Cuba, which represented Cuban women as either dangerous or in danger, as either gothic villain or gothic victim (p. 95). Chapter 5 ends with an examination of the way José Martí used tropes of fear, especially the figure of the monster, to

represent the United States as a more dangerous hemispheric presence than Cuba. García argues that Martí called on ontological claims of identity to unite Latin Americans against a corruptive United States, thus engaging in what she calls a “decolonial transamericanity,” an attempt to decolonize knowledge and combat multiple competing and interconnected empires in the Americas by drawing on gothicized images and patterns.

García’s arguments come across most clearly in her close readings of texts. In Chapter 3, for example, her careful reading of Sophia Peabody’s *Cuba Journal* and the ways in which Sophia’s experiences re-emerge, textually, as a haunting in her sister Mary Peabody Mann’s novel, *Juanita: A Romance of Real Life in Cuba Fifty Years Ago*, makes it one of the most interesting chapters. As a whole, in her focus on the gothic, García reframes in interesting ways literary works that have already received a great deal of critical attention, and brings to the forefront novel aspects of these works.

Despite highlighting its transamerican perspective, *Gothic Geoculture* is primarily focused on the United States and its influence in the hemisphere. Even when examining Cuban writers, for example, the discussion largely revolves around how they either adapt to or contest the image of Cuba as the gothic double of the United States. At times in the book’s analysis, the Cuban authors thus appear to be merely responding and reacting to “imported” U.S. discourses and gothic tropes rather than producing their own. And in García’s readings of the literature produced by U.S.-based writers, Cuba repeatedly emerges as a reflection of their own anxieties regarding the United States—not as an engagement with Cuban history or culture. (Indeed, as García notes, several of the authors never even traveled to Cuba.) So, were these authors truly articulating a transamerican imaginary if Cuba appears primarily as a reflection of themselves and/or their own anxieties? A deeper grappling with these questions would have enriched García’s thought-provoking exploration of the gothicization of Cuba in nineteenth-century literature.

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