“We always knew that the dismantling of the colonial paradigm would release strange demons from the deep, and that these monsters might come trailing all sorts of subterranean material,” writes Stuart Hall (1996:259). Hall addresses the ways in which the conduct of debate over the idea of the postcolonial “has become the bearer of ... powerful unconscious investments” (1996:242). Scholars of postcolonial literature, including Rudd (p. 1), have prominently cited the sentence about demons and monsters as a segue into their explorations of the entanglement of the Gothic and the representation of colonial history and its legacies. A genre that originated in mid-eighteenth-century Britain, the Gothic has shape-shifted over time and cultures and saturated the modern imagination to the point that Angela Carter could declare in 1974, “We live in Gothic times” (1974:122). Rudd analyzes the “subterranean” reaches of the Gothic in selected, largely contemporary texts from the Anglophone cultures of the Caribbean, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, seeking out the local particularities of the figures that haunt them.

In her chapter on Caribbean Gothic (“The Divided Psyche and the Duppy as Social Figure”), for instance, Rudd examines “schizophrenic splitting and doubling” as “personified by the polymorphous duppy, a figure that shape-shifts between ghost, zombie and soucouyant” (p. 27). Here the influence on Rudd of Marina Warner’s discussion of splitting and doubling (2002) is marked. The account of the Australian Gothic turns to the figures of the bunyip, drawn from Indigenous Australian cultures, and the lost child. In Rudd’s argument, Canadian Gothic thematizes “a haunting sense of absence ... arising from a sense of unease surrounding the individual’s location within the landscape” (p. 70) and “signs of haunting in New Zealand Gothic are visible as symptoms that are manifested through physical violence, through the grotesque, or through the abject” (p. 135).

Rudd’s analysis of primary texts is efficient within its own parameters and dutiful, and it usefully places canonical alongside less well-known literature. Over thirty-six pages on the Caribbean Gothic Rudd discusses Derek Walcott’s “West Indian Gothic” (from Another Life [1973]), Roger McTair’s “Just a Lark (or the Crypt of Matthew Ashdown)” (from Nalo Hopkinson’s 2000 edited volume, Whispers from the Cotton Tree Root), Lloyd W. Brown’s poetry collection Duppies (1996), Jean Rhys’s Wide Sargasso Sea (1966), Nalo Hopkinson’s “The Glass Bottle Trick” (from her 2001 collection, Skin Folk), Dionne Brand’s “Blossom, Priestess of Oya, Goddess of Winds, Storms, and Waterfalls” (from Sans Souci
Rudd’s breadth of example does not allow her scope to situate readings of
specific texts and authors in relation to the critical literatures on them; an
immersion in methodical elucidation of theme and character, at the expense
of such engagement, does not produce particularly fresh or radical insights.

As critics of the Gothic point out, “the Gothic tantalizes us with fear, both as
its subject and its effect” (Kavka 2002:209). Rudd rarely gestures to the produc-
tion of Gothic affect in the selected texts, a topic that cuts to important ques-
tions around the cultural specificity of readers, readerships, and receptions.
Hélène Cixous (1976:533) argues that Sigmund Freud’s reading of E.T.A. Hoff-
man’s story “The Sandman,” a crucial theorization of the Gothic, tends to “ren-
der uncanniness something too familiar.” Sidestepping questions around affect,
Rudd’s critical approach also renders the Gothic “too familiar.”

The pace of Rudd’s discussion exposes the limits of the structure and ap-
proach of the book. She pieces together the lineaments of local literary histo-
ries from stock texts in the field. Her generalizations about the regional and
national Gothic literatures at the core of her study are based on small sam-
ples of texts and support derivative understandings of the historiographies of
the literatures. Questions about the place,centrality, and influence of the sam-
ples in the broader regional and national literary histories are addressed per-
functorily. With respect to Anglophone Caribbean literature, Rudd invokes the
familiar historiographical model of postcolonial writing back to the metropole,
drawing on Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert’s 2002 essay “Colonial and Postcolonial
Gothic: The Caribbean.” Paravisini-Gebert’s literary mapping of the Caribbean
Gothic now looks rather dated given the plethora of twenty-first-century scholar-
ship on the contours of colonial Caribbean literatures, for example, editions of
colonial texts in the Macmillan Caribbean Classics series, the University of
the West Indies Press Caribbean Heritage series, and the Broadview Editions
series, as well as Evelyn O’Callaghan’s Women Writing the West Indies, 1804–
1939 (2004). Taking account of this new scholarship, Rudd could have redrawn
Paravisini-Gebert’s map, connecting her contemporary postcolonial sample
with metropolitan texts about, and colonial texts from, the region.

The strengths of Rudd’s book are its breadth of coverage across cultures
and canonical and less well-known texts, and its clarity of prose. Depth and
originality of historiographical scholarship, though, are sharply curtailed by the
breadth.

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