

**Ghosts from the Past:
Gothic and Postcolonial Themes in
19th and 20th Century Novels,
by Bansari Mitra
Wilderness House Press 2025, ISBN 978-
1-257-76984-1, \$22.00**

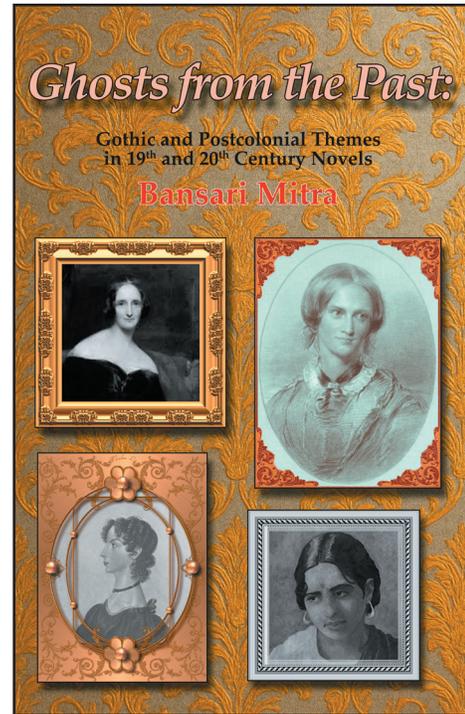
Review by Dr Kathryn Laing, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick

This volume comprises a thematic collection of essays, several rooted in an interest in eighteenth-century Gothic fiction and its transformations through the pens of the most famous figures of the early nineteenth century, Charlotte Brönte and Mary Shelley, as well as those deserving of more recognition including Anne Brönte. Attention is also paid to later authors whose works resonate with literary debts to these early figures, from the now iconic Daphne du Maurier to another popular fiction writer Victoria Holt and, in the twenty-first century, Paula Hawkins. The first essay argues, for example, that Anne Brönte's *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* deserves more recognition in the literary canon and opens up further angles by considering the generic hybridity of this early feminist novel, and the satire and wit that make it especially original and different from her literary sisters.

As well as a focus on the ways in which tropes of gothic fiction have been transformed in the various texts discussed, there is a recurring focus on fairy tales and in particular the attention to *Jane Eyre* as a Victorian Cinderella in the chapter on 'Hearth and Heath: Inner and Outer Spaces in *Jane Eyre*', intersecting with other readings of the Cinderella story in the novel. The thread is picked up again in an illuminating chapter on Indian revisions and adaptations of *Rebecca* and *The Prisoner of Zenda*. Attention to colonial contexts and postcolonial fiction and film is also a connecting feature.

In the intriguing essay, 'Postcolonial Recollections of a Colonial Encounter: Eliade's *Bengal Nights* and Devi's *It Does Not Die*, texts are introduced that readers of the Brönte sisters might not be familiar with but will want to read after encountering them here. Generic hybridity and questions about truths in life-writing, fiction and non-fiction through an analysis of these postcolonial recollections and colonial encounters are central to the discussion. The colonized other in *Frankenstein* and the role of Safie, another marginalized and yet central female figure, is a significant feature of the argument in the essay focused on Mary Shelley's famous novel.

As outlined by the author, one of the overall aims of the collection is to illuminate how the Gothic genre and its settings and milieus have evolved from the eighteenth century through to the contemporary moment. Paying



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attention to canonical as well as more marginal women's writing, this collection will stage an important intervention in rendering these voices visible in different ways. Readers who will seek out this volume with a particular interest in the themes and arguments of one of the essays collected will soon find themselves drawn to others that are connected directly or tangentially, suggesting new avenues for further research.