

Gothic in the Oceanic South: Maritime, Marine and Aquatic Uncanny in Southern Waters

Ed. Allison Craven and Diana Sandars

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The Oceanic South, a conceptually fluid and shifting space that unites the Pacific, Southern and Indian Oceans, frequently emerges as a haunted and unfamiliar waterscape in cultural narratives. While the region is marked by legacies of hydrocolonialism, extraction, and exploitation, and shaped by histories of trauma, displacement, and ecological precarity, it also upholds rich oral histories and Indigenous mythologies that remain underexplored in ecocritical, postcolonial, and Gothic studies. Indeed, the term “Oceanic South,” originally formulated in a 2019 essay of the same name by Meg Samuelson and Charne Lavery, is a space that “registers the persistent presence and legacies of northern resource extraction and settler colonialism in the South while being simultaneously alive to the more-than-human materialities of the sea and its inhabitants” (Samuelson and Lavery 46). As a spirited space, the Oceanic South inspires multifaceted ways of reading texts that acknowledge their dynamic, more-than-human influences and resist simplifying them into familiar frameworks (Samuelson and Lavery 46).

It is within this fluid and contested space that *Gothic in the Oceanic South: Maritime, Marine and Aquatic Uncanny in Southern Waters*, edited by Allison Craven and Diana Sandars, situates itself. By imagining the Oceanic South as an interconnected and haunted waterscape, the essays of this volume navigate the region’s colonial histories, environmental crises, and cultural expressions through a uniquely Gothic and comparative lens. Drawing on diverse voices across the Southern waters, the book stands out as a necessary contribution to postcolonial, ecocritical, and Gothic studies as well as Oceanic scholarship.

In their introduction to the volume, “Gothic Tides in the Oceanic South—Uncanny Contradictions and Compulsions,” Craven and Sandars address the usage of the term ‘Gothic’ to understand colonial anxieties and ecological vulnerabilities, focusing on the colonial histories of dispossession that emerge through ecological and temporal disruptions. They begin by noting how many “Australian landscapes symbolise colonisation through the legacy of *terra nullius*, the colonial legal principle by which the First Nations Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples were dispossessed of their lands” (Craven and Sandars 9). In a similar way, they show how the ocean has appeared as an uncanny and empty space that challenges borders and boundaries, where settler colonial anxieties materialize in the form of Gothic weather disruptions and monstrous creatures. In “Knowing the Uncanny Ocean,” Elspeth Probyn builds on this idea of the uncanny by

linking it to claustrophobia: the fear of being trapped in an unfamiliar space. Specifically, she draws on Paul Gilroy's 'offshore humanism' to reflect on the plight of those maritime workers and refugees stranded at sea during the COVID lockdowns in Australia. In a similar way, Adrian Drank, in "'Come in, the Water's Fine': The Drowning of Peter Weir's *The Last Wave*," explores forms of 'in-betweenness,' arguing that the film's Gothic elements create ecological and temporal disruptions that reveal submerged colonial histories of dispossession.

A similar attentiveness to submerged perspectives appears in Kate Judith's "The Other Alongside: Suburban Mangroves and the Postcolonial Swampy Gothic." Walking through the mangroves that embrace the shores of the Cook Rivers, Judith reads these twisted and gnarled formations as Gothic subjects that threaten colonial success and challenge colonial settler geographies and discourses. In "Acidification, Annihilation, Extinction: Exploring Environmental Crisis on the Great Barrier Reef Through Collaborative Ecological Sound Art," Leah Barclay and Briony Luttrell listen to the ocean's Gothic soundscape, noting how it evokes a sense of dread and anxiety that reflects the dire situation of the Reef. Isabel Hofmeyr's "Hydrocolonial Gothic: Robert Louis Stevenson and Makhanda—A Tale of Northern and Southern Seas" draws a comparison between R. L. Stevenson's haunted submarine world and Makhanda's spirited and ancestral sea. Charne Lavery further explores the submarine as an ancestral space in "Multispecies and Multispirited Seas: Submersion and the Gothic in Two South African Fictions," examining the sea as a space enriched by multispirited beliefs and cultural modes that defy the boundaries between life and death.

Moving to Aotearoa, Ian Conrich's "The Aquatic Kiwi Gothic: Isolation, Insanity and the Occasional Fisherman" examines the aquatic Gothic in fiction from multiple watery spaces: the coast, the foreshore, and the offshore. In "Northern Rivers Gothic, Ballina: A Seacoast Suite on Sharks, Shipwrecks and the Sea," Lynda Hawryluk uncovers similarly uncanny spaces, environmental disruptions and Australian First Nations' ecological knowledge through nonfiction poetry and photography. Seán Cubitt, in "On Mermaids, Disgust and the Gothic Sublime," discusses the abject bodies of Feejee mermaids as orientalist spectacles and subjects of racialized and gendered repulsion. In "Chartering Disney's Gothic Ocean in *Moana*: Wayfinding and Finding a Way to Intercultural Storytelling," Diana Sandars shows how *Moana* reimagines the Pacific Ocean's gothic waters as an agentic site of cultural restoration. Through the reclamation of wayfinding, she argues, *Moana* channels the essence of Tupaia's Map, which emphasizes the need for an intergenerational and intercultural understanding of oceanic navigation. In the final chapter of the volume, "Vampire Hydrology and Coastal Australian Cinema: Saturation Sunlight and Amphibious Beings," Allison Craven reads the cinematic figures of vampires as amphibious beings, working to reimagine vampire mythology through a hydrological lens.

By examining texts, myths, and cultural expressions specific to the Southern oceans, *Gothic in the Oceanic South* challenges the

conventional perception of the Gothic as an inherently Western genre tied to eighteenth-century Europe. Instead, it demonstrates how the Gothic—or the *globalgothic*—adapts to and resonates within non-Western contexts, addressing the haunted histories of a diverse region. The volume’s central contribution is therefore its regional, comparative, and transoceanic approach to the Gothic as a genre and field of study. Equally compelling is the collection’s resonance with recent conversations in ecocriticism, postcolonial studies, and the Blue Humanities, as well as its commitment to amplifying Indigenous voices from the Oceanic South within these fields. Across the chapters, discussions of Indigenous mythology help to position the Oceanic South’s aquatic environments as spaces of cultural and ecological memory, underscoring the profound connections between culture, mythology, and the natural world. Through discussions that range from First Nations Dreaming to Māori sea spirits and mermaids, the ocean emerges in this volume as an animated, dynamic, and agentic space that defies temporal and even spiritual planes. In this way, *Gothic in the Oceanic South* transcends the boundaries of traditional Gothic studies, offering fresh perspectives that foreground the voices, stories, spirits, waterscapes, and histories of the Oceanic South.

Significantly, in engaging with the urgent themes of climate crisis and environmental degradation, this volume foregrounds the crucial need to listen both to Indigenous voices and to the ocean itself in conversations about environmental care and conservation. In this way it not only enriches Gothic and postcolonial studies but also contributes meaningfully to ecological and conservationist discourses. This makes *Gothic in the Oceanic South* an essential text for scholars across multiple disciplines. Equally, it shows how there will always be more stories to uncover from Southern waters, inviting further exploration of literary and cultural waterscapes across and beyond the Oceanic South.

Works Cited

Samuelson, Meg, and Charne Lavery. “The Oceanic South,” *English Language Notes*, vol. 57, no. 1, 2019, pp. 37–50.