

Introduction

Suzette Mayr

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Suzette Mayr is the author of five novels including *Monoceros*, which was awarded the ReLit Award, the W. O. Mitchell Award, and was longlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize. Her most recent novel is *Dr. Edith Vane and the Hares of Crawley Hall*. She has published articles in *Horror Studies*, *Canadian Literature*, *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en littérature canadienne (SCL/ÉLC)*, *The Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, and in *Antipodes: A Global Journal of Australian/New Zealand Literature*. She teaches at the University of Calgary.

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I present to you three, up-and-coming writers from the University of Calgary graduate creative writing program. You've heard it here first, and I write this without hesitation: Dania Idriss, Marjorie Rugunda, and Mikka Jacobsen are great talents and will go on to write even more magnificent things.

When I first approached these writers asking for fiction for this issue of *Canada and Beyond*, one of them asked me if I had a theme in mind. Although I didn't know what work they might give me when I solicited each of them for a piece of fiction, I knew these writers all had two things in common so I answered, "female-centred, gothicky, but gothic in the loosest sense." I didn't bother to define what I meant by "gothic," as I knew that the term has become more elastic over time; I didn't define what I meant by "female-centered" either, wary of imposing limits.

While "Gothic" literature as a category has expanded to become more and more inclusive – some would even suggest inclusive to the point of meaninglessness, what with a growing plethora of sub-genres such as "southern Gothic," "Victorian Gothic," and "queer Gothic," for example – "female Gothic" is an area that continues to intrigue as the notion of "woman" launches into the 21st century, is continually deconstructed, and becomes more embracing of difference and diversity. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock defines the "female Gothic" as "the category of literature in which female authors utilize Gothic themes in order to address specifically female concerns" (1). But this only tells part of the story. My experiences as a woman in a patriarchal world have always made me feel that my body is a foreign country or a haunted building – first when I was a young woman pimpling through puberty, and now as a menopausal woman going through physiological changes that have slammed into me like a train in the dark. Idriss, Rugunda, and Jacobsen show no fear in writing about the experience of being a female Other in a world that is often hostile, and frequently violent towards female-identified bodies. Even the most familiar landscapes, can – with the setting of the sun, the turn of a wrong corner, or the company of the wrong person – transform the world into gothic, treacherous landscape, our own bodies into uncanny territory.

Dania Idriss in "The Brass Bowl" writes of a woman living in a war-torn country, but there is another war going on between the protagonist's desire and societal expectation, between mother and daughter. Marjorie Rugunda in "The Disappearing Island" presents the reader with a world inhabited by women only, and the shifting dynamics and sacrifices that arise when a girl starts to venture beyond the confines that mark her home. Mikka Jacobsen writes of a young woman whose body in essence betrays her, and her futile attempts to recalibrate.

These three stories acknowledge and emphasize that fierce connection between the female and the Gothic – that no matter how much we think we're "home," "home" is always a tenuous construct, and always uncanny.

Works Cited

Weinstock, Jeffrey Andrew. *Scare Tactics: Supernatural Fiction by American Women*. Fordham UP, 2008.