Abstract

My paper focuses on a comparative study of ideologically mobile Gothic forms in two postcolonial texts from Ireland and Ukraine, Europe’s frontier regions of sorts, situated at its extreme Western and Eastern fringes. Emma Donoghue and Oksana Zabuzhko engage in navigating Gothic spaces and frames in their rewritings of folkloric narratives in Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins (1997) and A Tale of Cranberry Flute (2000) respectively. In their metafolkloric projects, the authors draw on historical continuities and discontinuities within oral tradition and negotiate its strands. Being simultaneously analysts of fairy tales’ cultural implications and improvisers, they both embrace the past and scrutinize its claims for authority by using the “doubled voice” via which the past is referenced, reframed, and rethought. Both Donoghue and Zabuzhko self-consciously enact femininity as a means of deconstructing its traditional status through the “monstrous queer” (Dallas Baker) in Kissing the Witch and “monstrous-feminine” (Barbara Creed) in A Tale of Cranberry Flute. Although Irish writer’s transgressions of compulsory heterosexuality are seemingly more benign than her Ukrainian counterpart’s tale of terror, in which the antagonist turns out to be one of those supernatural beings, those raging lunatics or vampires, the potential violence of her tales is imbedded in their precursor texts (such as, for example, Bluebeard).

Representations of non-heteronormative genders and sexualities in Donoghue and of insatiable, vampiric eroticism in Zabuzhko interrogate and problematize mainstream version of reality and “normal” gendered values. Both Donoghue’s and Zabuzhko’s narratives find their meaning in the uncanny return of what seems to have been repressed in their intertexts by moving from the mythic timelessness and archetypal world of fairy tales to specific cultural and historical moments. The ubiquitous Gothic turn of the examined texts is instrumental in breaking up the coherence of space and narrative, unveiling hidden reality, reflecting the instability of the world, and releasing latent transformative energies. Both writers textualize political strategies of empowerment and articulation through intertextual dialogues that play a particularly important role in postcolonial literatures as they open up spaces for