When wandering the streets of a global megapolis, such as New York or Hong Kong, or the labyrinthine, historic entertainment district of Kyoto or the Latin Quarter of Paris, who has not felt a sense of awe at the city as a living, breathing entity that both enchants and terrifies? Such an anthropomorphized view of a global megapolis is an example of a convergence of modernity and economic advancement, associated with an urban sphere since the Enlightenment, with irrational and supernatural modalities brought forward by cultural anxieties that emerged in response to an increase in social mobility in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The *Supernatural Cities* volume, edited and compiled by Karl Bell, tackles this dichotomy of rationality and irrationality associated with a global city and offers academic and creative investigations of urban ambiences and cultural diversities across five continents, eleven countries, and four centuries (from the late eighteenth century to the present day). Bell’s own scholarly research in cultural and social history, urban studies, and the newly emergent field of psychogeography (which studies the emotional responses and imaginations tied to specific locales) led to the creation of the Supernatural Cities project that resulted in several conferences and, finally, the present collection of essays.

The fourteen essays contained in *Supernatural Cities*, along with Bell’s editorial foreword and several accompanying illustrations, map the “fantastic imaginary” over the spatial urban environment, offering sociopolitical readings that unearth complex historical traumas related to colonization, displacement, racial and ethnic marginalization, and other problems associated with inequality, political subjugation, and migration in the world capitals and industrial centers. Divided into three creative sections that focus on the supernatural lore originating in the city—“Urban Enchantment,” “Urban Anxieties,” and “Urban Spectrality”—the volume criss-crosses academic fields and historical periods, drawing on anthropology and folklore, literary and comparative studies, sociology, religious studies, urban development and planning, and various subfields of cultural geography. The division of essays is fluid and themes from the “Urban Spectrality” section, especially related to economics and colonization, appear in essays of two other thematic sections (for example, the contributions by William Redwood and Morag Rose appear in two different sections of the volume but offer similar cultural representations of London and Manchester with political undertones through the lens of the dérive or the drift, in other words, an uncharted stroll through the city streets). On the whole, however, the collection
does a great justice to mark the tonal modalities of the spectral cartographies and to situate the urban Gothic and its phantasmagoric references in both historic and localized contexts.

The first section, “Urban Enchantment,” features four essays that look at the historical and contemporary proliferation of the supernatural in capitals and provincial centers of France (by William Pooley), South Africa (by Felicity Wood), Ireland (by Tracy Fahey), and Great Britain (by William Redwood). These contributions range from studying witchcraft practices in Paris, as presented in the French press during the long nineteenth century, to the contemporary blesser practices that entail exchanging intimate relationships for commodities and are entangled with the lore about the mythical mamlambo spirit in South Africa. Two other essays in this section look at the collection of memoratas and fabulatas about the banshee and other demonic spirits in Irish folklore and chart the magical maps of London, based on contemporary esoteric practices that provide alternatives to organized religions.[1] Altogether, these essays ponder the development of a localized urban identity that is formed in diverse communities of a particular city. The supernatural practices and lore tie such identity formation to the concept of the genius loci (the spirits of the place), historical remnants of which persist in the studied cities despite rapid urban development and changes in infrastructure and land use. In this way, the urban supernatural lore performs a community-building function, enriches a story space and cultural capital of the contemporary city, and serves as a warning against the extremes—for example, materialistic values or consumerist cravings—that globalization and rapid urban development bring to the city.

Section 2, “Urban Anxieties,” focuses on feelings of abandonment, rupture, and horror that destabilize and alienate the identities of inhabitants in the studied locales. This section is longer than the other two in the volume and features six essays that address the predisposition of Gothic conventions to provoke fear and concern (rather than enchant). The literary representations of the cities and their dwellers examined in this section focus on collective colonial guilt and alienation in a postmodern society, harmful environmental changes, and shifting and radicalized political power structures. This section is particularly rich in literary scholarship. Two essays provide an in-depth textual reading of select works of fiction: H. P. Lovecraft’s short story “The Horror at Red Hook” (1927) on the ethnically mixed New York (by Oliver Betts) and Haruki Murakami’s novel Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World (1985) on a dystopian, futuristic Tokyo and its alienating qualities (by Deirdre Flynn). Others explore the Gothic trope “city-as-hell” (on the example of the City of Manila in Anglo-American cold war and post-cold war fiction—by Tom Sykes) and the Gothicized depiction of the underground metro system (that, as Alex Bevan’s essay demonstrates, proliferates in several contemporary British novels). These literary portrayals find parallels in folk narratives collected and studied by the authors of two other essays in this section: one on the “young” Ural cities in Russia (by Natalia Veselkova, Mikhail Vandysh, and Elena Pryamikova) and the other on the metropolitan area surrounding Washington, DC (by David J. Puglia).

The third section of the volume features four essays that focus on urban ghost lore. Hauntings in the Australian city of Ballarat and the city’s former colonial status and politics are discussed by David Waldron and Sharn Waldron. María del Pilar Blanco examines Mexico City as haunted by the ghost of its short-lived Habsburg emperor Maximilian. Contemporary Beijing, populated by spirits of its former imperial courts, defeated armies, and premodern folk beliefs and practices, forced to the margins by China’s present socialist regime, is the focus of Alevtina Solovyova’s essay. Finally, Morag Rose’s essay studies spectral Manchester and the city’s violent legacy of indust-
trial development. While exploring how spectral references unearth guilt, trauma, and uncomfortable heritage linked to the exploitative past in the studied cities, the essays in this section also consider the regenerative power of the supernatural, combining, in a creative way, the Gothic modalities of the urban supernatural lore—enchantment and horror—discussed in the previous two sections.

Collectively, the essays in the volume present a fascinating read and point to several reoccurring tropes and themes in relation to urban supernatural lore: water and its contrasting qualities as a life-giving but also a destructive force; metaphors related to the human body employed for the creative depiction of the cities (with the metro/underground areas and socially undesirable districts presented as the “gut,” the “bowels,” or the “underbelly” of the city); and traces of trauma, displacement, and suffering hidden behind capital urban planning. All three sections in the book open with a historical piece (on nineteenth-century Paris, New York, and Ballarat) and close with an essay on a contemporary city that features a type of earthly energy, such as water floating through Manchester’s canals in Rose’s piece; the sewers of Tokyo in Flynn’s essay; and the esoteric energy nourishing London in Redwood’s contribution. What is curiously missing from the volume, especially in the section on spectral urbanity, is a reference to the mausoleums, particularly those of the communist leaders, who promised to build socialist utopias (and the cities of the future) but whose promises often translated into totalitarian imprisonment and repression. Indeed, several contemporary Gothic novels employ a motif of the vampirization of embalmed corpses in the mausoleums in the capital cities—examples are American author Elizabeth Kostova’s novel The Historian (2005) and Bulgarian American author Nikolai Grozni’s novel Wunderkind (2011). As a comparativist and an east Europeanist, I also would have liked to see a piece specifically on nuclear cities. There is a brief reference to nuclear plant facilit-