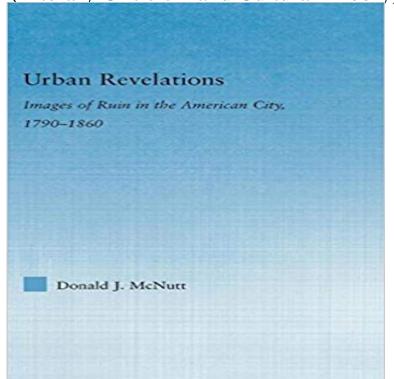
Urban Revelations: Images of Ruin in the American City, 1790-1860 (Literary Criticism and Cultural Theory)



This study reexamines the ethos of national progress by analyzing how American writers import images of ruins from European aesthetics to cast the city as a site of instability and cultural impermanence. While highlighting the transatlantic currency of ruin imagery, the study interdisciplinary demonstrates through analyses of architecture and material culture how American images of ruin intersect with the symbolic geographies of city and home to shape and reflect citizenship, law, and perceptions of race. Arguing that ruin imagery works to disclose the cultures inner dimensions, the study incorporates deep archival research and synthesizes theories on geography and architecture to read unstable settings in the works of Philip Freneau, Charles Brockden Brown, Poe, and Melville. The study focuses on the ways these writers relied on ruin imagery to interpret such subjects as Anglo-Indian relations in the nations early capital; the dialogue between secrecy and yellow fever in 1790s Philadelphia; the impact of antebellum penitentiaries on conceptions of mind and domestic space; and the mutability of nationhood in the decade just before the Civil War. The book provides dynamic ways of reading the relationships among urban culture, ruin, concepts of instability, and the formation of American literature.

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