



Laurence Talairach, *Gothic Remains: Corpses, Terror and Anatomical Culture, 1764-1897*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2019, 304 pp. eBook £70.00. ISBN 9781786834621

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Only a few years ago, taking a break between the panels of a conference on Victorian Literature and Culture in Florence, I sought to escape the heat of the Italian summer by visiting the city's Natural History and Medical Museum, commonly known as La Specola. Within the museum's walls, I encountered a series of objects which were equally familiar to me from the anatomical culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as they were from the pages of the period's popular sensational and Gothic fiction. Laurence Talairach's monograph, *Gothic Remains: Corpses, Terror and Anatomical Culture, 1764-1897*, extends a thriving subfield of scholarship which fleshes out these vital connections. Five chapters tackle the interplay between anatomical imagery and Gothic tropes: the skeleton in the trunk, anatomical models, body-snatching, medical museums, and live burials. Through placing anatomical texts and contexts alongside those of the Gothic, Talairach aims to reveal how "the Gothic did more than simply disseminate new constructions of the body in light of the development of modern techniques of dissection", instead articulating fears related to the corporeal self with "the very same tools used by scientific explorers of the body in the same period" (5).

Deftly touring through analyses of Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1778) and Ann Radcliffe's *Romance of the Forest* (1791), Chapter 1 investigates how the motif of the skeleton in the trunk provided Gothic authors with the possibility to combine a symbolic representation of death with a more realistic image of the decaying body. While Reeve and Radcliffe explore the haunting potential of the motif, it was popularised to such an extent that, later in the century, the anonymously published *The Animated Skeleton* (1798) simply uses the anatomical body as clichéd shock factor. This historicist approach, which guides readers through changes in the use of anatomical imagery in Gothic literature through the framing conceit of a specific trope, is the basis for the structure of subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 is the first in a string of three strong and interconnected chapters, and returns us to the anatomical models of La Specola. Using multiple examples from Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) to George Brewer's *Witch of Ravensworth* (1808), Talairach evidences how the pervasive presence of waxworks in Gothic literature symbolised the acquisition of medical knowledge through the penetration of the sexualised female body. The chapter culminates in an analysis of the macabre waxworks depicting executed murderers on show in institutions such as Madame Tussauds. Their influence on the representation of the corpse-like body of Miss Havisham in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861) reveals an enduring association with crime and punishment which also materializes in the death masks exhibited in the office of the lawyer Jaggers.

As the century progressed, there was less reliance on wax models as educational tools and an increasing demand for cadavers on which medical students could practice dissection. This, alongside an increase in the number of practising medical students, led to the rise of body-snatching in order for demand to meet supply. The Gothic fallout of this practice is the subject of Chapter 3. Talairach uses examples across the century to underscore the anatomically-inspired connection between the exhumed body and the enlightenment project of knowledge in a range of Gothic texts, from the charnel origin of Frankenstein's creation in *Frankenstein* (1818), to Dickens's rhetorical use of the motif of interment and "resurrection" in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859).

Chapter 4 synthesises these interweaving motifs of the wax model and the dead body through an analysis of the site of their display: the medical museum. Chapter 2's focus on scandals about specimens representing gender and sexuality in medical displays is surfaced in Chapter 4's analysis of the propriety of display culture and the access of female visitors to exhibitions focused on sexual disease; meanwhile, Chapter 3's investigation of the trade in bodies is carried through to the commodification of the body in Victorian collections culture. This 'objectification' of the body is explored in Gothic texts, from "The Case of George Dedlow" (1866), in which the 'spirits' the central figure encounters are those in which his amputated limb floats, to the 'morbid tastes' and obscene exhibition of the female body in sensation fiction, through a survey of exhibited bodies in works by Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins.

The final chapter explores live burial and other liminal states of consciousness which present as death, including catalepsy and trances. Talairach compellingly positions the patient's helplessness – their awareness of what is happening to them and their simultaneous incapacity – as a staple of Gothic fiction, which "sensationally rewrote in much more realistic terms older tales of imprisonment, particularly female imprisonment – since most victims of catalepsy seemed to be women" (176). This is most convincing in the chapter's analysis of Carmina's confinement in Collins's *Heart and Science* (1883), where the character's "hysterical disturbance" and "affection of the brain" were increasingly "examined in the context of the development of neurological science" (194). Spotlighting a return to the supernatural in the *fin-de-siècle*, Talairach subsequently examines the multiple sleep states which pervade Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), in which "the characters' unbalanced nervous systems are related far less to modern technology than to the presence of a vampire" (201).

As may be apparent at this point, *Gothic Remains* incorporates a significant number of texts. This is simultaneously a strength and a challenge. One benefit of the monograph's breadth is a balanced inclusion of canonical texts with lesser-known examples which reveal the two-way traffic between anatomical culture and the Gothic. So much material is covered,

however, that on occasion the analysis presented is not given room to breathe; this is a shame because the author's close reading, stitching together the narrative tissue which binds medical history and Gothic literature, is the monograph's greatest strength. At the same time, the significant amount of material Talairach covers allows her to trace developments across time and texts, and the author herself points out that the anatomies under discussion often haunt the margins of the Gothic genre, and at times require a little unearthing. *Gothic Remains* figures a vital contribution to the body of research which investigates the interconnections between the anatomical body and literary culture, and is essential reading for scholars of the Gothic, the medical humanities and museum history alike.