Marie Mulvey-Roberts, *Dangerous Bodies: Historicising the Gothic Corporeal*
(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016)

The volume of scholarly research written on the gothic is so vast and the genre so extensively examined by scholars that it can sometimes seem unlikely that any room for groundbreaking work on this subject could remain. However, Marie Mulvey-Roberts' *Dangerous Bodies: Historicising the Gothic Corporeal* provides nuanced, innovative readings of such important and familiar works as *The Castle of Otranto* (Horace Walpole, 1764), *The Monk* (Matthew Gregory Lewis, 1796), *Frankenstein* (Mary Shelley, 1818), *Dracula* (Bram Stoker, 1897), and *Nosferatu* (F. W. Murnau,1922) in an attempt to 'point to the real-life narratives of fear, danger, and persecution, which underpin the fictional terror and horror of the Gothic' (p. 11). In her detailed and convincing analysis, Mulvey-Roberts adeptly intertwines and then separates the persecuted and persecutor, the monster and victim, all while juxtaposing these binaries with institutional oppression. The closing sentence of the book successfully summarises the scope of Mulvey-Roberts' work. She writes, '[t]he endangered or dangerous body lies at the centre of the clash between victim and persecutor and has generated tales of terror and narratives of horror, which function to either salve, purge or dangerously perpetuate such oppositions' (p. 224).

This is a book replete with wide-ranging and well-documented explorations of such topics as monstrous alterities; bodies as politicised messages; the capacity of literature and film to serve as mirrors of human suffering; the visceral reality of a genre that is steeped in gore and the bleeding body; warfare and its complex appearance as metaphor in works dealing with vampirism; and the body as an arena over which battles relating to society, politics, race, religion, class, sexuality, and gender have been fought. One of the most enthralling elements of this text is what it can tell us about the authors of canonical gothic works, and indeed the questions raised throughout may cause discomfort to the reader accustomed to accepting the unchallenged or traditional biographies of these writers. In addition to a bibliography, which is thorough and quite up to date, and an index, the text contains five main chapters ('Catholicism, the Gothic and the Bleeding Body', 'Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, and Slavery', 'Death by Orgasm: Sexual Surgery and *Dracula*', 'Nazis, Jews, and *Nosferatu*', and 'The Vampire of War') and a closing chapter ('Conclusion: Conflict Gothic').

The first chapter, which sets the tone for entire work, presents intriguing readings of Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and Lewis' *The Monk* within a religio-political context, in

order to argue that 'even overtly negative literary representations of Catholicism invariably prove to be less of an attack on the Catholic Church than a means of opening up subversive ways for critiquing secular hegemony and repressive governments' (p. 15). The interrelationships between the barbarically repressive Inquisition, gothic fiction, the Henrician Reformation, and 'the transition from a papal to a Protestant world view' (p. 21) form the nexus of investigation for this chapter. Of particular interest is eighteenth-century gothic fiction's preoccupation with Roman-Catholicism: texts from this time abound in phantom friars and nuns, desecrated buildings, Jesuit intrigue, the *auto-da-fé*, wicked abbesses, licentious monks, and theological misogyny. The next chapter, 'Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, and Slavery', shifts from the political and its interrelationship with religion to slavery, emancipation, rebel female slaves, and miscegenation. Here we find suggestions that Mary Shelley made ample use of the 'discourse of slavery' (p. 52) in her novel, which can be read as a 'textual patchwork of abolitionist writing and pro-slavery propaganda' that is 'inscribed on the body of the monster' (p. 53). Most importantly, Mulvey-Roberts asserts that this novel, which is full of contemporary negative reactions toward miscegenation, was ameliorist in its stance. Indeed, George Canning, the Foreign Secretary and Leader of the House of Commons, had referred to Shelley's work in a parliamentary debate 'as propaganda against the immediate emancipation of slaves' (p. 54); but more importantly, Mulvey-Roberts points out, on more than one occasion, Shelley wrote that Canning's compliment to her work was pleasing to her. The argument has been made that Canning had '"misread"' (p. 57) Shelley's intentions, but Mulvey-Roberts asks, if there was a misreading, why Shelley didn't distance herself from this association, and notes that the likelihood was that Shelley was 'sympathetic' to Canning's position (p. 58).

Chapter Three, 'Death by Orgasm: Sexual Surgery and *Dracula*', continues Mulvey-Roberts' focus on the female body and sexuality, through an examination of Stoker's novel, the monster found within its pages, and the disease that the monster suffers from, which she reads as a 'trope for an invented female pathology, believed to require a surgical solution' (p. 93). This chapter, without a doubt, is the most impressive of the book. The author highlights a vast array of elements within the novel relating to the body, which, she argues, can be viewed as 'Victorian pathologising of feminist and Freudian hystericisation of women's bodies' (p. 94); in particular, she focuses on Lucy's sexualised body, which needs to be destroyed, and on Van Helsing and his group, who she reads as castrating surgeons, operating on a hysterical woman. The medical/biological/physiognomic details of this novel, the author cogently

argues, may have been influenced by William Thornley, who was an eminent doctor and a colleague of one of Stoker's brothers (three out of the five Stoker brothers practiced medicine). Stoker may, therefore, have had first-hand knowledge and experience of the current state of gynecology, of the belief that mental illnesses originated from female sexuality, and of surgical procedures performed on women suffering from all types of medical issues.

Staying with Stoker's novel, in 'Nazis, Jews, and *Nosferatu*', Mulvey-Roberts convincingly argues that, although Stoker never explicitly identifies Dracula as Jewish, and never writes anything blatantly anti-semitic, the novel clearly depicts the Count as a 'multilayered and composite character' (p. 130) whose most noticeable characteristics are Jewish in nature. These characteristics are based on racial stereotypes that may find echoes in certain passages from the novel; for example, the vampire women who sate their thirst for blood with the blood of children may recall the repulsive Blood Libel accusation against the Jews. She also mentions the anti-semitic connection with the hoarding of money, and the use of the Evil Eye in the novel, which is an 'embodiment of evil that was also associated with Jews' (p. 134).

Chapter 5, 'The Vampire of War', builds on previous analyses of the figure of the vampire and its appearance in literature and film. In this chapter, however, the vampire is analysed as a metaphor for war in 'novels, films and short stories from the Crimean War […], through to the Russo-Turkish conflict […], First World War […], and up to the Vietnam War' (p. 180). This chapter, like all of the preceding chapters, includes thoughtful observations like the association between the Balkans' status as a 'particularly volatile cradle of war' and the fact that it is also 'a region notorious for nurturing legends of the vampire' (p. 180). Moreover, as Mulvey-Roberts points out, the traditional masculine pursuit of war is often 'allegorized as a vampiric woman' (p. 196). This chapter is quite convincing in its argument and in its linking together of the nature of the vampire, its association with the hatred of the foreigner, and the allegorisation of war as a communicable disease that, as in the case of syphilis in wartime brothels, is often related to female sexuality or some disease that is blood borne. Moreover, as Mulvey-Roberts puts it, 'war is the ultimate horror and supreme blood-sucker' (p. 179). From this discussion on conflict, war, and vampirism, the closing chapter, 'Conflict Gothic', does a fine job of arguing that the gothic as a whole arose out of conflict, as well as discussing the transformation of the genre caused by the French Revolution and Henrician English Reformation

Mulvey-Roberts has put together an excellent text that is soundly designed and structured, rigorously documented and supported through compact and learned endnotes, and includes cogently argued concepts, analyses, and interpretations. *Dangerous Bodies: Historicising the Gothic Corporeal* will, I hope, become a standard text for the field.

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