***Technologies of the Gothic in Literature and Culture: Technogothics*, ed. by Justin D. Edwards** (New York and London: Routledge, 2015)

Too often collections exploring 'literature and culture' tend to prioritise the former, with the occasional nod towards film or television. This is certainly not the case with *Technologies of the Gothic*, an admirably wide-ranging collection of essays taking in everything from steampunk to dubstep, celebrity news coverage to zombie running apps. Gothic and media technology have long had a close relationship; as Joseph Crawford points out early on, 'Gothic, like those monstrous families upon which it has always been so fixated, tends to mutate further with every generation, taking advantage of the possibilities offered by each new form of media technology for the articulation of monstrosity, instability, and disruption' (p. 40). However, the 'technology' which brings this collection together is not only that of film, TV, computer games, and other media, but also acoustic and, in particular, medical technologies. The thirteen chapters link together particularly well, and credit must be given to editor Justin D. Edwards for shaping a collection of essays that was originally the conference proceedings of the International Gothic Association's Biennial Conference. So, for example, the chapters move smoothly from sound, to sound and zombies, to zombies and biomedical horror, to biomedical horror and organ transplants, to organ transplants in the media. There is some occasional duplication of materials but, for the most part, the essays overlap effectively and inform each other without being repetitive.

Following Edwards' introduction, Fred Botting's 'Technospectrality: Essay on Uncannimedia' works well as an opening chapter, giving a useful overview of many of the topics which will appear throughout, particularly the spectral and the uncanny. In this regard, he looks in detail at *The Sixth Sense* and the moment of 'spectral self-consciousness'. The famous twist at the end of the film, he notes, provides closure for the protagonist but audience disappointment. Thus, the film's ending 'only reaffirms that "when we go to the movies, we see dead people". To have this enacted so unequivocally disrupts visual pleasure' (p. 28). Joseph Crawford also explores gothic and media and, while perhaps not treading too much new ground, reminds us how perfectly the gothic genre adapts to new and hybrid media forms. As he rightly points out, the real question is whether it is 'likely that any new form of mass media technology could *fail* to manifest itself in Gothic forms' (p. 36, emphasis in original). He traces the routine outbreaks of moral panic surrounding new media, looking at the 'trope of the Terrible Text' from H. P. Lovecraft's *Necronomicon* to *The Ring* films (2002-17). Updating the trope for the present day, Crawford focuses in on the 'Slenderman'

YouTube videos, in which a shadowy figure lurking in the background of online video footage is supposed to have abducted or murdered the video's creator. The Slenderman mythos is particularly suited to an age of viral video; not only are the videos shared online by fans and creators, but the 'rules' of the mythos actually promote the creation of video. These rules, as Crawford explains, are that the Slenderman causes both memory loss in potential victims and distortion in any video recordings made while in close proximity. Thus, potential victims begin perpetually recording their lives in order to check their memories against the video and to look for the tell-tale distortion. As a result, Slenderman content is endlessly created and disseminated. The technology in this case may be more contemporary but, as Crawford points out, the videos are simply another incarnation of the same fundamental fear that the gothic text somehow corrupts the vulnerable. This is a fear with a long history, from the gothic novels of the 1790s, to horror comics of the 1950s, to more recent horror computer games. But, in the end, '[t]he myth of audience vulnerability to moral contagion through new media technologies proves to be the most pernicious Gothic fiction of all' (p. 46).

The visual gives way to the aural in the trio of chapters which follows, each challenging what Kelly Gardner refers to as the 'ocularcentrism' (p. 72) of our worldview. The essays are linked by their acoustic focus but examine quite varied media — literature, music, and computer games respectively. Justin Edwards looks at (or perhaps more accurately listens to) 'acoustemology', which he defines as the way in which 'the union of acoustics and epistemology calls attention to the primacy of sound as a modality of knowing and being in the world' (p. 55). This underexplored area presents new opportunities for the gothic. Edwards highlights the ways in which Roald Dahl's 'Sound Machine' (1949) and Leonora Carrington's *Hearing Trumpet* (1974) undermine the primacy of the visual by connecting with a newly heard, non-human world. In the former case, the connection is with vegetation, as the protagonist of Dahl's story invents a device to capture vibrations inaudible to the human ear. To his horror, he discovers that he can hear the inhuman screams of roses being cut by his neighbour. When he takes an axe to a nearby tree, he hears a 'harsh, noteless, enormous noise, a growling, low-pitched, screaming sound' (p. 52). In Carrington's text, a woman's hearing trumpet allows for an unimaginably amplified sense of hearing. Not only can she hear sounds at a distance, but she also gains access to the previously inaudible world of the dead. It must be said that at times Edwards' sentences can be as opaque as the hidden sound worlds explored in his chapter. Take this example: 'Klausner's insights into the organic utterance of pain and suffering gestures to ontological inseparability agentially intra-

acting components that signify the mutual constitution of entangled agencies that are relational through intra-actions between forms of organic life' (pp. 52-53). This is a minor quibble, however, in what is ultimately an insightful and informative chapter that makes a strong case for the significance of the aural in the study of the gothic.

The foregrounding of the acoustic is continued by Charlie Blake and Isabella van Elferen, who highlight the 'inherently spectral' (p. 61) nature of music more generally from Kraftwerk to dubstep, and by Kelly Gardner, who focuses on a single sound: 'Braaiinnsss!' The zombie, 'perhaps the only Gothic monster that is definitively tied to a specific sound', has inspired a wide variety of video games, but the 'iconic zombie drone' (p. 72) is a constant feature of their soundscapes. The chapter gives a relatively straightforward overview of the ways in which music and sound provide player immersion, before looking at the intriguing *Zombies, Run!* This running-companion app prompts its users to run in order to escape attacking 'zombies', their presence announced by the recognisable zombie moan. The app blends a typical zombie-apocalypse narrative (the player is a 'runner' gathering supplies for a survivalist team) with the standard features of a running app, recording the requisite statistics using the mobile device's GPS and accelerometer. It is audio alone which provides the story-world and context as well as the cues to indicate attacking zombies or other dangers, prompting the player into physical actions. Many games and other media claim to provide an 'interactive experience' but few reach this level.

Moving from zombies to biomedical horror, Roger Luckhurst explores the 'New Undead', those 'interstitial beings' (p. 88) in coma states whose lives are maintained by technology. This is a world of 'potential cadavers' and 'neomorts', 'irreversible comas' and 'Persistent Vegetative States'. The bioethical issues are profound and unsettling: when is a patient truly dead? How much do coma patients feel or understand? At what point should organ transplants be allowed? While this ethical minefield may be a relatively new area for doctors (essentially since the 1960s and the advent of the ICU), the undead have always been a part of our culture in one form or another. Luckhurst explores how it is 'in cultural fictions that the implications of these new interstitial beings are fully worked out […]. This is the odd zone in which genre spills out from the limits of fiction, and where generic tropes, icons and narratives *help shape* reality' (p. 91, emphasis in original). The key date is 1968, the year in which an American committee relocated the definition of death to the brain, and in which George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* was released. From here, Luckhurst traces the new undead from the 1977 medical thriller *Coma* to its re-imagined 2012 miniseries version,

via *28 Days Later* (2002), *The Walking Dead* (2010-present), *Resident Evil* (1996-present), and *Fringe* (2008-13). Each fictional representation of the undead, in its own way, influences our understanding of the very real 'undead' of the hospital ICU ward, significantly shaping what Luckhurst terms the 'biomedical imaginary'.

The biomedical imaginary is further explored in the two chapters which follow. Sara Wasson looks at the gothic aspects of organ transfer, and the complicated and conflicted emotions that recipients can experience. Barry Murnane, on the other hand, takes as his subject matter a single recipient of an organ transplant — George Best. The chapter explores the moments leading up to Best's death, three years after receiving a liver transplant, and the media response to his impending death. Best becomes yet another interstitial being; as Murnane writes, '[d]id anyone really care if Best was *actually* dead or alive? While the obituaries suggested he was dead, the constant screen images of him offered a virtual re-incarnation' (p. 119, emphasis in original).

Science fiction, a genre which understandably makes its way into a number of the essays in the collection, returns more explicitly in Rune Graulund's chapter on the gothic science-fiction novel *Necroville* (1994), by Ian McDonald. Ultimately, however, the chapter covers much of the same ground as previous chapters on the undead, in this case focusing more particularly on the world of the novel in which the resurrected dead are enslaved to the living. The two chapters which follow — Alan Gregory on disability and performativity in the work of Patrick McGrath, and Maisha Wester on cannibalism in the Sawney Bean and Sweeney Todd tales — both contain a number of useful insights. Both, however, seem a little out of place in the collection. While they certainly focus on the gothic, there is very little in the way of *technology*, in any of the various guises under which the theme has been interpreted in the rest of the collection. Linnie Blake's chapter on Mark Hodder's steampunk fiction brings the focus back, in this case to what Blake terms 'neoliberal Gothic'. She notes that steampunk, despite its celebration of the past, is 'a genre pronouncedly concerned with the present moment'. In relation to Hodder's novels, she convincingly argues for a 'sustained exploration of the trauma wrought to global ecology, society and selves by the vicissitudes of post-1970s global capitalism' (p. 167).

The collection ends with Peter Schwenger's deliberately B-movie-inspired title 'Language Will Eat Your Brain'. He explores the concept of language itself as a parasite, and a number of texts which use the idea of a 'language plague' as a premise. In the end, he concludes, stimulating literary texts which allow for multiple readings and 'literary

disruption' are our best defence against any such plague. He urges, '[m]ove things around people; let words and narratives become increasingly strange' (p. 184). So maybe that Edwards sentence quoted above is, after all, a perfect example of literary disruption. Certainly, this well-edited and thought-provoking collection provides the stimulating reading we need to 'resist the smooth and insidious plague that would turn us all into zombies' (p. 184).

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