Sara Wasson, *Transplantation Gothic: Tissue Transfer in Literature, Film, and Medicine*
(Manchester University Press, 2020)

Medical transplantation of tissue from one body to another is a celebrated life-saving achievement; it has also inspired some of the most gruesome and unsettling horror narratives. Joining a number of sociological, medical, anthropological, and philosophical books about organ transplantation – such as Oliver Decker's *Commodified Bodies: Organ Transplantation and the Organ Trade* (2014) and most recently Paul Craddock's *Spare Parts: The Story of Medicine through the History of Transplant Surgery* (2022) – Sara Wasson's *Transplantation Gothic: Tissue Transfer in Literature, Film, and Medicine* presents a unique and nuanced combination of rhetorical, cultural, and literary study that confronts the limited ways in which discourse surrounding transplantation has been socially constructed and acceptable. It is deeply thought-provoking in its challenging material and bold analysis.

This book makes a significant contribution to the fields of Health Humanities and Gothic Studies in its complex examination of the enduring experiences of tissue transplantees ('donors') and recipients. Wasson convincingly argues that the language and imagery of the gothic, while complicit in cultural impressions of transplantation, can also help us to access, understand, and, most importantly, witness the complex suffering involved in a situation deeply rooted in the horror of corporeal, economic, and cultural vulnerability. Wasson explores the nuances of problematic oversimplification, which forces transplantation into narratives of benevolence or malice through both well-known texts (like Robin Cook's novel *Coma* (1977) and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005)) and many more obscure ones. As she demonstrates in every chapter, these experiences of horror, dread, and unease – gothic experiences – point to larger structures of vulnerability, power, and inequality at the root of relevant health-care debates in the US and UK. Through careful analysis of the networks of bodies transgressing boundaries in history, culture, and medicine, Wasson's important work applies the gothic to reveal narratives of hidden suffering.

As Wasson explains with care in the Introduction, she chooses her terminology with intention, preferring 'tissue transfer' over 'organ transplantation', to indicate inclusion of biological material beyond organs, for example. Through the concept of 'bodies dis(re)membered', she describes the cultural work of the gothic: to remember bodies typically omitted from medical narratives, to acknowledge the haunting incompleteness of these narratives, to problematically mediate and normalise certain narratives and practices, and to emphasise the concept of assemblage and its related processes. While the gothic articulates

anxieties about tissue transfer, it can also introduce speculations about new ways to shape and meet human experience. To demonstrate this, she interweaves critical theory and histories of tissue transfer throughout each chapter, with particular attention to participants often cast aside and the discourses that neglect them.

Throughout the book, Wasson makes her methodology transparent, resulting in a text that is easy to follow and offers a model of careful scholarship. Each chapter focuses on a different figure playing a particular role in the tissue-transfer system. Chapter 1 examines representations of cadaveric harvest, including the inconsistent and varied definitions and determinations of death that enable this system. She uncovers the disturbing philosophical and practical medical, legal, and epistemological conversations about a body's relationship to the machines that keep it 'alive', as well as the unknowns about such an experience and how decisions are made regarding it. This includes a history of the 1968 'Report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Harvard Medical School to Examine the Definition of Brain Death' and the impact it has had on personhood through actual medical case studies.

In Chapter 2, Wasson turns to fictional representations of organ theft, physically forced or coerced through financial oppression performed by large-scale medical institutions such as hospitals and healthcare corporations. Fictions like Robert Fiveson's film *Parts: The Clonus Horror* (1979) and John Hejinian's novel *Extreme Remedies* (1974) expose these trusted institutions as corporations and capitalist machines that pose insurmountable threats. Cruelty may not be the point of these systems, but it is more than acceptable within them, as their inhumanity preys on and erases the humanity of victims. Similarly, Chapter 3 applies the concept of 'slow violence' to racial marginalisation in global tissue-sale networks, focused on the US, UK, and India. Not restricted to economic vulnerability, this chapter considers the legacy of colonialisation and slavery that inform the way bodies are presented, used, and intentionally forgotten. This chapter combines a history of abuse with the hidden duration of suffering represented in fictions like Manjula Padmanabhan's play *Harvest* (1997).

'Donor' bodies are not the sole bodies that suffer. Chapter 4 shifts to tissue recipients and their uncanny experiences of hybridity, invasion, and alienation. This chapter, perhaps more than any other, demonstrates the ways in which the impact of transfer endures beyond the operation, even for participants considered to be 'the lucky ones'. As Wasson explains, the gothic validates the recipient experience as a potentially negative one, full of fear, anxiety, and doubt, despite the additional guilt these feelings might incur. This chapter balances critical theory and philosophy with literature that fictionalises blood transfusions and hand and face transplants. Finally, Chapter 5 looks at a range of dystopian fictions and their powers of

speculation and metaphor as indicative of predatory practices. These worlds create unmistakable hierarchies of lives in ways that indicate hierarchies that may exist outside of fiction. Wasson examines novels like Neal Shusterman's *Unwind* (2007) and Ninni Holmqvist's *The Unit* (2006) that provide a wholistic view of the complex systems of oppression that draw inspiration from our own.

Each chapter highlights the ongoing vulnerability of those involved in tissue transfer performed by corrupt or wilfully ignorant capitalist institutions. The interdisciplinary nature of the book reveals that these gothic fictions are informed by real suffering. The impressive range of theory, history, and fiction also includes works by Giorgio Agamben, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari; and literary and media fictions like Mary Elizabeth Braddon's 'Good Lady Ducayne' (1896), Maurice Renard's *The Hands of Orlac* (1920), Gardner Bowers's 'The Black Hand' (1931), *Les yeux sans visage* (dir. by Georges Franju, 1958), Larry Niven's 'The Jigsaw Man' (1967), *Night of the Living Dead* (dir. by George A. Romero, 1968), Dennis Etchison's 'The Machine Demands a Sacrifice' (1972/1984), Walter Mosley's 'Whispers in the Dark' (2001), and *Dirty Pretty Things* (dir. by Stephen Frears, 2002), among many others. As Wasson writes, 'the concept of a gothic "mode" is valuable shorthand for a specific combination of disturbed emotion, claustrophobic space, and disjointed temporality, a constellation of characteristics which can be especially useful in describing challenging transfer-related experience' (p. 5). Wasson skilfully illustrates that the desperate acknowledgment of the great achievement of transplantation often erases the suffering inherent in it. The gothic serves the Medical Humanities by forcefully calling attention to that suffering.

Wasson shows that the gothic is not just a social-justice tool here, however; it is also complicit in reinforcing the institutions that feed on rhetorics of fear. One of the many strengths of this book is the deep nuanced examination of the versatility of gothic modes for different purposes. When applied to the critical medical humanities, the work the gothic does becomes even more complex, but Wasson beautifully articulates the ways it is a vital and impactful addition to interdisciplinary biopolitical conversations about experiences of embodiment.

Alongside other recent works like Emily Russell's *Transplant Fictions* (2019), the strength of which lies in its breadth, *Transplantation Gothic* is particularly strong in terms of the depth of its analysis and more focused commitment to the work performed by the gothic. This book is provocative and a joy to read. It will appeal to both experts in several expansive fields and their advanced students. While several threads tie all the chapters together as a cohesive whole, each chapter also stands independently with its own endnotes, making it easy to select chapters for teaching purposes. As a good book of critical scholarship should, it

provokes difficult questions without offering easy answers while offering a fascinating array of perspectives from different disciplines.

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